

The Amazon

a novel by
ELLIOT PAUL

Author of
**Low Run Tide and Lava Rock,
Imperturbe,
Impromptu,
Indelible.**

THE AMAZON

A NOVEL IN FIVE PARTS

By ELLIOT PAUL

Author of *Low Run Tide* and *Lava Rock, Imperturbe*, etc.

TO the roll call of the soldiers of fiction add the names of Alberta Snyder, first lieutenant, Mary Fahey, orderly, Sergeant Florence Mason and Corporal Juanita Ray.

This Signal Corps of American girls fought side by side with men in the trenches, lived as men in the mud and the vermin and the ribaldry of war; and like men suffered the hazards of gas and bombs from the air. Shrapnel raked the breast of one; another took her life in fear of capture and violation; and a third found a husband.

(Continued on back flap)

Jacket design by **SUGAR**

THE AMAZON

By the Same Author



INDELIBLE
IMPROMPTU
IMPERTUBE
LOW RUN TIDE
LAVA ROCK

THE AMAZON



ELLIOT
PAUL



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TO
Gertrude Stein
PIONEER

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PART ONE



What I Learned from John McCann

I FIRST met Private McCann in a little café in the Paris market district, just off the rue Pont Neuf. It was the third winter after the war, and at some hour after midnight, when the wagons loaded with produce were beginning to line up outside the cavernous sheds and the sleeping tramps were rousing themselves from the doorways to look for odd jobs. At that time I was working at night, on one of the American newspapers, and was gradually getting acquainted with the city I had not been able to visit during the hostilities. After press time I would walk through the markets on my way to the place Saint Michel, and I used to stop quite often at that same café to get something to eat and a few drinks before going to bed.

It was a strange quarter in which to seek to be alone, for the sidewalks were thronged with men in butcher caps and stained aprons, peasant women in sabots, teamsters in corduroy, and the streets smelled of fresh meat and cabbage leaves. Boxes of fruit and quarters of lamb were passed back and forth from tailboard to doorway and bright arc lights played steadily upon the busy corners, mak-

ing the lighted windows dim and lavender, and, by reflecting from the overcast sky, surrounded the whole swirling scene in a haze which blended from pink to pale orange. Against the dark shining pavements and the drab clothes of the country people, were the carmine caps and bright blue belts of the market men and, for miles around the circle, windows and rooftops were dark and silent.

Inside the café, at the bar, men and women crowded toward the counter, shouting in half a dozen dialects, then hurried outdoors again to resume their work. But the tables, ranged against the wall a few feet away and dimly lighted, were always unoccupied, so that I could sit as long as I liked, watching the turbulent activity on the streets and not at all disturbed by the din which maintained an even drone. Only the waiter knew me and he strolled my way now and then to see if I needed anything. None of the other customers noticed me.

Sometimes about five o'clock in the morning, a Spanish accordion player would come in, take a seat in the corner opposite me and begin to play, softly at first, and then more freely as the crowd at the bar got used to the sound and ceased to pay attention. He played lazily, almost mechanically, Spanish boleros or Italian waltzes which slid easily from one key to another. Often I would nod to the

waiter to give him a drink, but he would take nothing but Malaga which he sipped very slowly and often would let stand before him an hour before he touched it.

One night as I was sitting there listening to the music, I noticed that another man had taken a seat two tables away, on the same bench. At first I was annoyed, especially after he remarked in English that he liked music. I had realized even before he spoke that he was not one of the regular customers, and as he turned toward me I saw below his coat the yellow edge of an American army leather vest.

"I knew you were an American," he said, when the accordeon player stopped to sip his drink, but he implied in his tone that he also knew I did not relish being disturbed and for a long time was silent. Since the strain of maintaining the silence grew oppressive to me, I motioned the waiter to ask him what he wanted to drink.

"You're not a tourist?" he said.

"No, I work here," I replied, and he nodded. His French proved to be, if anything, worse than mine and I began to feel more sympathetic with him. The Spaniard started to play again and when our glasses were empty, McCann ordered another round and paid for it, still following the American fashion of handing over the money when the drinks

were brought. I had suspected that he might be short of funds, but that did not seem to be the case. From the very first, his status puzzled me and stirred my curiosity, and what is more unusual, I remember that right away I felt that he was more than a passing acquaintance, that we had come together in the middle of the night for some strange purpose.

The room filled with tobacco smoke, which streamed past the windows where an arc light shone in. Neither of us said much that first evening. I think he did not even move up to my table. But as the night went on we felt more and more content not to stir. The markets all around bustled more furiously, with men yelling at the horses, trucks honking their horns and hucksters shuffling to and fro across the sidewalks. Stacks of carrots and cauliflower rose higher along the curbs and when at last we stepped out of doors the thin daylight made the roofs to the east stand out sharply and brought the fading street lamps to angry points. I was surprised that it was nearly seven o'clock and that the traffic was already being swelled with laborers and shivering girls on their way to work. Even then, I wondered whether I should climb six flights to go to bed, or take a morning walk by the river. McCann waited a moment, watching me out of the corner of his eye to

see which way I was going. Then he shook hands and strolled off in the other direction, toward Saint Eustache. He walked with his hands in his pockets, unconcernedly, and faded into the crowd, discernible only by the slow progress of his cap through the sea of heads around him. He had said little about himself, and offered no explanation of why he was abroad at such an hour. I am sure that if I had started out that first morning in the direction of Saint Eustache, he would have said good-by and taken the street toward the Pont Neuf. And yet, although he had not said specifically that he would return another night, something in his manner seemed to convey his intention of seeing me again.

II

My life during that period followed an easy routine which left my best hours free for wandering and reflection. I seldom went to bed before daylight or found it necessary to sleep much beyond lunch time. In the afternoons I walked the narrow streets in the quarters which still had the aspect of old provincial cities or explored the less frequented rooms of the dingy museums; and the older the buildings or objects I found, the stranger and more exotic they seemed to me. It was as if I were moving in a century to which I did not belong and

which ignored me completely for that reason. Among the men I worked with, I am afraid I had gotten a reputation for unsociability, since to be alone had become almost a mania with me, so much so that I could not eat with comfort in a crowded restaurant nor bear to be hemmed into a theater. When it came time to quit work, I would find some pretext to slip away so that I might cross the city alone, and I kept my address a secret so that no one could find me in the daytime.

For this reason, it surprised me that I should be so anxious about McCann, the day after his first appearance. I awoke with a feeling of vague suspense and all the afternoon I thought about him, intermittently, regretting that I had not suggested in some way that he could find me there on other nights and that I did not mind his sitting there with me. So after the paper had gone to press, I traversed the rue Montmartre more hastily than usual and hurried through the great square by Saint Eustache without a glance at the grim flying buttresses which seemed to lean against the moving clouds nor at the baskets of frost-bitten Brussels sprouts among which I passed on narrow paths of asphalt. When I entered the café he was not there, but a half-hour later, as I sat there trying to reason away my disappointment, he appeared in the doorway, nodded to the woman at the cash drawer and approached me

more cautiously than before. This time I invited him at once to sit down.

He showed no signs of having been injured, except for a slight nervous movement of his face muscles when he was otherwise unoccupied. He was a trifle absent-minded, yawned without dissimulation, and sat rather limply on the upholstered bench, his legs stretched out beneath the table. There was surely nothing military in his postures, although there lurked in them a mild appreciation of their non-military character. But his eyes were clear and fairly steady and although he often repeated to me what he had said before, the essential facts never varied. All in all, I found him rather poised, almost self-satisfied, for his idleness did not appear to be enforced, but the natural state of his existence.

At the time I met him, he could not have been more than twenty-eight years old, and he looked even younger. That would have made him twenty-two when he enlisted. He was healthy enough but not rugged, and just below the average in stature, so that with his rather boyish face he must have been the type the officers naturally would have selected for the less onerous duties. Right at the start he told me that he had been a lieutenant's dog-robber in the A.E.F., and he said this with satisfaction at having beaten the army by finding an

easy job, comparatively safe. Never did he show signs of having given one minute's thought to either the causes, aims or consequences of the conflict in which he had taken part.

In the café and on the street he invariably wore the same clothes, a cheap French suit in a sort of purplish blue with a yellow thread just too conspicuous, the shoulders padded and the waist drawn in. He had no overcoat, but his leather vest was sheep-lined and hung below his coat, so that it kept him warm enough. On cold nights, also, he would appear with a pair of light-colored leather gloves, also from the army stock. His attire, because it never varied, had almost the effect of a uniform, and I am sure he thought of it in that way since from scattered remarks I soon deduced that he had spent all the years since his grammar school days in a uniform of one kind or another. Before the war he had been a conductor on a street car and had worn a visored cap, with blue serge coat and trousers and brass buttons.

We were never molested in the café. The tourists seeing Paris by night went to the larger places prepared for them on the wide streets, and if now and then a French group sat down for a sandwich or *choucroute garnie*, they paid no attention to us and understood nothing of what we said. Having nothing in particular to do, I looked

forward each evening to the long quiet hours ahead. There was no responsibility on my part to keep up the conversation and McCann almost never asked me a question, except to inquire what outfit I had been in and the names of the places to which my service had taken me.

For him, everything dated back or forward from the war. He could scarcely believe that his comrades who had gone back to the States were older than they had been when he had known them and were scattered from one end of the country to the other, involved in civilian life. He could not realize that in Boston, where he had lived, the saloons he had frequented had been closed or that the Revere House had been torn down. But he described persons and places vividly, as he remembered them, and it was not long before I, also, was living again in a sort of war atmosphere. Imperceptibly I dropped back into the army slang and thought of France as it had been in the days of the A.E.F., swarming with soldiers of all colors and races, with troop trains crawling across its landscapes, prisoners toiling by the tracks, and regiments snoring in the stations or tramping the muddy roads.

I thought at first McCann might be a deserter, for I had met two since coming back to France, one driving a taxi in Paris and the other in a small

Norman village, raising a family. On the third or fourth night, however, he took his discharge from his coat pocket to smooth and refold it, and he spoke of it so affectionately that I dropped that hypothesis at once.

Knowing the plight of most stranded Americans in foreign lands, I was most curious about his means of support. He had no job that I could discover. There seemed to be no reason why he should be drawing a pension. He showed no signs of having a home. And yet he was always in funds. His money he carried in a small old-fashioned leather purse, with the bills neatly folded in quarters and the change loose in the central pouch. I realized I had seen others like it, and when he told me about his street car job I recognized it as the kind conductors used before the patent nickel-plated change machines were hooked on their belts. The amount of money he carried never varied much, a few ten-franc notes and perhaps fifteen francs in small coins the exact value of which was still rather hazy to him. Once in a while, after he left me, he would drop into Saint Eustache for early mass and he carried with him, besides his discharge, the little card which the chaplains had distributed during the war to enable soldiers not speaking French to avail themselves of the services of a French confessor.

All night long he would sit with his legs stretched out luxuriously and his feet protruding beyond the limits of the table, drinking rum and chuckling to himself as he listened to the music or waited until the mood to talk came upon him. His boots were polished, his cheeks clean-shaven and his hair cut military style. What was before him he enjoyed and except on rare occasions he displayed no anxiety about anything outside his range of vision. His easy acceptance of facts which might have affected a more thoughtful or sensitive person too deeply gave him an almost Olympian attitude.

Perhaps it was the music and the drinks and the peace which is associated with the dead of night, but as I listened to him, hour after hour, the men and women he described became uncannily familiar to me so that I was able to observe them and feel their motives almost independently of what he said, and my mind became so filled with his story that I was continually revolving and rearranging the facts which he let drop haphazardly and with no regard to chronological order. The region he described was quite familiar to me, since my own experience had taken me back and forth through similar territory. From the very first I felt an impulse not to mention this to him, for I was

afraid he would spare the details he remembered so well.

III

MOST of the boys he had grown up with had joined the Navy and, on their shore leaves, had brought him such dismal tales of the training stations that he had no desire to get into the same predicament. Still, as one by one his neighbors appeared in uniform, he realized that he would have to leave his job. The whole thing puzzled him, for he seldom read beyond the headlines. Certain members of his union suggested that he claim exemption but he had no conviction that such a move would help him. So he had drifted and when just before the draft law became operative his opportunity came to enlist, he did so with the feeling that he was following his luck and that somehow he would be taken care of.

There was nothing heroic in his attitude toward his army career. Before the war, his thoughts had run in narrow circles. He had expected to collect fares on his car, go on strike now and then, and add a stripe to his sleeve every five years.

A tall red-headed army captain named Casey, then stationed at Camp Devens, had ridden on McCann's car two or three times a week and McCann

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knew that he was in the habit of visiting the wife of a locomotive engineer along the route while the husband was on the Portland end of his run. Having passed the same houses and carried the same passengers during three years, McCann knew a great deal of what took place in the community, and he enjoyed the feeling of knowing more about people than they thought he knew. He had no great liking for the locomotive engineer and a sort of sympathy for the wife, who had always shown a great deal of vivacity, and it pleased him to watch closely the expressions on Casey's face, going and coming, and to chuckle as he passed the house between trips and noticed that the curtains were down. Particularly he liked to glance knowingly at the trim little woman when he chanced to meet her in church and to try to disconcert her during mass by concentrating his thoughts upon her pleasures.

One day, however, after he had seen the railroad man ascend the front steps, McCann saw Casey on the outbound trip. As he passed stop after stop, ringing the bell and making change, he debated with himself as to whether he should let the impending incident take place or warn the captain. It was the fact that he would be out of sight before he could see what happened that decided McCann in favor of the latter course. Casey was so

grateful, and at once embarrassed, that he told McCann that if he wanted to enlist he would get him into his outfit, which was due to sail before many weeks, and would treat him right. That seemed the moment to take the step, so the same afternoon he went to a recruiting tent, passed the test, and was on his way.

It was thus, I learned, that McCann had become a member of the 213th field signal battalion.

He wore the skin from his hands and lamed his back digging roots and grubbing brush from the field near by and each morning was sent into a telegraph class, where he tried to learn the international code in the midst of two or three dozen other men who were almost expert. He was so far behind the others that the instructor paid no attention to him, so he spent the hours thumping out dots and dashes at intervals when he thought some one was looking at him and trying to get into a comfortable position on the wooden bench. Being as unaccustomed to sitting down all day as he was to hiking, he found it even more painful and failed to learn the alphabet well enough to remember it from day to day. Just as he began to feel completely out of luck, Captain Casey remembered him and got him the job of waiter in the officers' mess.

Snow fell, covering the hills which surrounded the camp, and the new draft contingents marched



each day down the long white pathways. There was no taps in the officers' mess, so McCann loafed through the gray afternoons and talked and read in the quiet evenings. It was the sort of tranquillity he had never experienced before, with no check upon his behavior and no need for counting his money. He had been born on a street over which, early in his childhood, the elevated railroad had been built, and had heard day and night the grinding of wheels upon rails, the rumbling of pillars and the echo of iron rims upon the cobblestones below. Camp Devens was supernaturally still, although men in drab uniforms marched and scurried everywhere. When a bugle sounded in the evening, its sharp tones cut through the frosty air and the faint shouts from the drill field in the morning scarcely penetrated the walls. On his frequent visits to the carbarns, he admitted that he had the best job in the army and he had quite resigned himself to remaining where he was. His idea of France and of the war as a whole was so vague that he had no impatience to cross the ocean, although in the beginning he had wished sincerely to get out of Camp Devens as soon as possible. He often would ride back and forth on the platform of his old street car, telling the new conductor anecdotes about the dwellers in the houses they passed and describing all the spotters to him. Still, as he rode over the route,

he no longer felt that he belonged to it. The military activities had gotten under way so ponderously that he did not give a thought to their possible conclusion. In camp it was the general belief that the war would go on for ten or twelve years. On several of the corner lots, new buildings had been put up. Some of his old customers had bought Fords and rode back and forth to work in them. Many of the girls were married to soldiers and already pregnant. And in front of the carbarns, by the side of the blackboard on which delays were recorded, was a gilded honor roll bearing his name.

McCann enjoyed sizing up the different officers, but Lieutenant Nichols, with whom he was to spend a large part of his army life, he never understood at all. The lieutenant had joined the battalion from Plattsburg. He was a New Hampshire man with a sharp solemn face and angular shoulders, who had been principal of a high school, and he took the military regulations more seriously than did the men of longer experience. He was the only one of the battalion officers who seemed content to stay in his room while off duty, and he kept his clothes and various articles in meticulous order.

The winter in camp, while so satisfactory to McCann, had had results for Captain Casey. He had maintained his love affair at a certain tension in the fall in the expectation of leaving the

neighborhood on short notice, but when his stay at Camp Devens was prolonged he grew moody and the engineer's wife more exacting, with the result that they lost their discretion and the railroad man named Casey as co-respondent in a divorce suit. He was called before the commanding general and, being one of the first upon whom could be laid the responsibility for the many complaints of the civilians in the neighborhood, was sent to a Southern camp as drill instructor.

Early in the spring the men were sent out to drill again, and the whole cantonment buzzed with rumors that they were to sail, but the signal men had had so many false alarms and delays that they would believe nothing. The talk persisted, in the canteens and barracks, until the more credulous began to insist that it was true. Girls appeared from the surrounding cities, strolling up and down the road by the pond, and extra men were detailed to help the company clerks who prepared new rosters day after day.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the sergeant's whistle blew and McCann heard the roll of C Company barked beneath his window. There was a light in the supply sergeant's shack and he saw the men filing past, two and two, holding blankets into which articles were being thrown from the

window. He roused the cook and they dressed in order to find out what was going on. After the company had gone back to quarters, he asked the supply sergeant what was going on.

"They told me to issue another O.D. blouse and a new overcoat," he said. "You better grab one, Mac."

The next day they were told to turn in their bed sacks so that the following night, after waiting until midnight for orders, they slept on the bare springs. Then at ten o'clock in the morning, a long train pulled into the shed at the back entrance of the camp and a few hours later the word to march was given. From the roads and windows of the huge cantonment, the other recruits saw the battalion mark time and slowly stretch down the path to the train sheds, packs slung, arms swinging, two and two.

McCann and the cook, who had tacitly agreed to stick together, fell in at the rear of the headquarters detachment, stumbling over the heels of their comrades when "Squads right" was given. They had forgotten what little they knew about drill or telegraphy and since the officers' mess had been dismantled and turned in they had no tangible function in the outfit, but they clambered up the steps of the train, found a seat together and tossed their packs upon the baggage rack, watching from

the window the low hills and bleak barracks of Camp Devens recede.

## IV

THREE weeks later, McCann awoke one morning with a tickling in his throat and the smell of hay in his nostrils. Through a wavering crack and a knothole sunlight wriggled across the floor and touched the blankets which covered him. He sat up, slowly, and saw that six other men were sleeping near by. Pulling on his boots and wrapping his leggings drowsily, he tried to remember where he was, then gave it up, for all that remained in his mind was the recollection of bumping for days upon the cindered floor of a box car, piling out in the middle of the night and marching up a long, steep hill. He climbed down a ladder and found himself in a barn, with one shaggy draft horse tied in the corner and hens picking oats from the dirt. The door was open and the view obscured by a huge manure pile.

"Where you from, boys?" he said to two small children who stood just outside staring at him. The smaller one started to run.

The street was dusty and lined with plaster huts thatched with straw or covered with tile half hidden by the moss. At either end it seemed to lead off into space. He turned to the right.

Some women and a toothless old man standing around the village pump looked his way and began talking excitedly, but McCann could not understand a word. He went on, until the single street came to an abrupt end in front of a walled château, shaded with venerable trees and set far back from the gateway. Before him was a vineyard, sloping far down to the level of the plain below upon which he could see the river winding and straight white roads lined with poplars. Bright sunlight bathed the fields, softly tinted with daisies and clover. Half-grown grain and streaks of yellow mustard were fitted in strange mosaics at his feet and in the distance and on other hills, to the east and west or across the valley, small red-tiled roofs and somber tree tops clustered about their single spires.

Half a mile beyond the river, a long freight train with small, ill-assorted cars and camouflaged artillery crawled lengthwise across the meadows, and McCann could see for the first time the small station at which the outfit had detrained the night before. None of the others were stirring, so he walked back past the barn in which he had slept and into a sort of square in which there were one or two small stores and a squat stone building marked "Mairie." It was the first sunny day he had seen in France and the first time he had been dry and



comfortable. In the rear of the butcher-shop, where a plump red-faced woman was cutting meat, he saw two more old men in broad straw hats sitting at a wooden table and noticed the word "Café" painted above the door. That was what he was looking for. He went in, with a cordial "Good morning," for he had been told he must speak to every one in France, and made signs for a bottle like the one the farmers were drinking. It turned out to be white wine. As he sat there, confused and colorful fragments of the past twenty days lurched in and out of his mind, obliterating everything in his memory before the moment he had found himself at sea. Events had lost their relative value.

On boarding the ship McCann had been led down a half-dozen slippery iron ladders and through long narrow corridors smelling of tar and devitalized air, to a small compartment with a cement floor and iron-posted bunks four deep, side by side. It was far below waterline. There was one blue light and a small iron wall basin with a faucet which dripped continually. He had unslung his pack and, unable to find a place to hang it, placed it at the head of his bed for a pillow. The cell was hot and stuffy and he was sweating from the hurried succession of ladders and the weight upon his shoulders. As he started to take off his blouse a

sailor stuck his head through the doorway and yelled:

"Keep your clothes on, buddy, night and day."

His wrist watch and matches were collected and taken away, and a sack of feathers was given him to hang around his neck. No one could say whether or not the ship was moving.

When they were called out for mess, they shuffled along a foot at a time, up the ladder and through some greasy galleys where the footing was so treacherous that several of the men fell down. The tar smell was mingled with grease and disinfectants. After nearly two hours he reached the mess hall and a sailor slapped the thin remnants of a stew into his pan, but when his mug was filled with coffee it collapsed and drenched him, while the others cheered.

He found his way back to the compartment and crawled to his bunk. His trousers were wet and smelled of rancid coffee. The blue light dimmed and the hum of the ventilator rose and fell. Only once in the night he awoke with a headache, then fell asleep again.

The second day out from Hoboken he had been told to report to Lieutenant Nichols, and not having had the slightest idea as to where to find him, had started dazedly climbing upward. As he got farther away from the engines, he lost his sense

of motion and seemed to be in the midst of some dismal underground structure, struggling toward light and air. Seeing a canvas flap covering a doorway, he slipped through the opening. A gust of wind struck him in the face and the bright sunshine blinded his eyes. He was on deck, and in a sharp blue circle around him was the ocean and five great gray liners, streaked with angular shapes which just failed to be tangible, kept pace with the *Agamemnon*, smoke trailing from their funnels.

He wandered from stateroom to stateroom on A deck, chuckling at the silvered wash basins, whisky bottles, linen sheets and plush carpets. At last he had seen the lieutenant sitting disconsolately on his bunk with the door ajar.

"Sir, the major told Private McCann to report to the lieutenant," McCann said. Lieutenant Nichols told him he was to be his orderly and said very little else. The lieutenant's chance of service in the field had been spoiled by his promotion to the office of adjutant, and while he followed his instructions from Plattsburg to do as he was ordered, it was evident he was bitterly disappointed. He had no friends in the battalion and before the day was over, as McCann fussed around the stateroom, polishing leggings and hanging up clothes, the lieutenant told him his troubles. He explained

that the equipment of the battalion, all the telephone and telegraph supplies, wires, pliers, climbers, tools, rubber boots, the hundreds of articles which had been packed carefully into boxes painted olive drab and stenciled according to orders and without which the outfit was helpless to perform any useful duty, had not been taken aboard. The members of the signal battalion were off for an extraordinary war with one shirt apiece and their side-arms.

McCann from that moment began to like Lieutenant Nichols and to feel a certain loyalty to him. From that time on, he seldom went below, for he could always use the pretext that he was working for the lieutenant when the top sergeant wanted him with the company and could say he had been detained in formation if the lieutenant asked him where he had been. He found that by giving the flunkey in the officers' dining room a half-dollar he could get sirloin steaks and ham omelettes and coffee with canned cream, so he ceased standing in line two hours to go to the crowded mess hall.

Nichols had never had a servant, except an old hired man on the farm, and did not know exactly how to treat one. He tried at times to be familiar, again to be aloof, mixing his concepts of democracy with the military formulas he had learned in the training camp, but before long he relaxed and

talked more freely with McCann than he ever had with any one else. He realized many times that McCann did not understand what he was talking about, and on other occasions that he was divulging things which had better be kept secret, but he could not seem to keep from talking to the single sympathetic listener he knew.

It had been while McCann was polishing a pair of leggings for the sixtieth time in order not to appear unoccupied that the adjutant had stuck his head in the doorway and told him to go out and see land. Ahead was a faint streak which was said to be Europe.

Soon the coast became more distinct and a darker stratum of trees was visible above the sandstone cliffs. Then a little fishing smack with a rich brown sail had appeared and the swift destroyers which had been circling the convoy since the danger zone was reached hove to, one by one, formed like geese, and steamed out to sea again. As the *Agamemnon* entered the harbor, above which a row of blimps hovered awkwardly, straining at their cable ends, two empty liners flying the American flag cleared the breakwater, and steamed past. The decks of the six incoming transports swarmed with soldiers in khaki, cheering and shouting. Small craft cut in between them, veering this way and that, plaster houses huddled in groups on the shore,

and the companies were formed in the greasy corridors, packs were slung, and the 213th field signal battalion took its place on deck as the *Agamemnon* slowed down, its propeller churning the water, and finally brought up in the harbor at Brest.

The battalion reached Laferté-sur-Amance, in the foothills of the Vosges, early in June, but although the outfit had been sent there for training, the men had nothing but the clothes upon their backs. So there was no daily grind and the weeks to come were particularly restful to them.

The major spent his days in distant towns trying to get equipment and transportation for them, the adjutant did what he could by correspondence, and the other officers were willing to take things easy. The burden of keeping the men occupied fell mostly upon the top sergeant, a young lawyer who had refrained from going to an officers' school because of mildly socialistic ideas. Sergeant Horn overlooked the fact that the men sent out to drill lay down in the shade and dozed, or that many of the bunks were empty after taps. McCann referred to him frequently and always with admiration.

There were seven girls in the village, which had no more than thirty houses, and four of them lived in the château in which the major and the adjutant were quartered. Another was the daughter



of an old woman who sold newspapers, the sixth was pleasant and obliging but very careful of her conduct since she was engaged to marry a Frenchman who had been wounded so badly that he had been given a job as policeman far behind the lines. The other, named Madeleine, helped her mother keep a small store in the square and soon, when the wineshop became too crowded, a number of the men used to gather in Madeleine's place each evening drinking wine from bottles and trying to talk with her. At once she took a fancy to Sergeant Horn. She was of medium height, with honey-colored hair and a very sweet voice, and on Sunday wore black, with neatly polished shoes and kid gloves. With infinite patience, she fingered the pages of the sergeant's dictionary to find the words he needed while her mother, although it doubled her work, encouraged the girl to devote her attention to him. The mother had heard that he was a lawyer in America and the amount of money she took in every night confirmed her belief that all Americans were rich. And it was known throughout the village that Madeleine had tuberculosis and could not marry a farmer because she was unable to work in the fields. She cried all day when Sergeant Horn left and eagerly asked McCann for news of him, for although the main battalion was ordered out of Laferté late in July, the adjutant

and a part of his detachment were left there to forward supplies, trucks and motorcycles which never came.

McCann made the lieutenant's bed in the morning, swept the room, took his uniforms to one of the village women to be mended, read scattered pages of his books on economics, and spent the larger part of his time in Madeleine's store, trying to answer her questions about Sergeant Horn and greeting the other men as they strolled in or out. The squalor of the huts and the acrid odor of the manure piles ceased to trouble him as he walked up and down the village street, and although he did not know a word of French he was able to make himself better understood by means of signs than were most of the others. At night after taps he ate fried eggs or trout in a house on a little back lane and he had found a sort of arbor behind the château, near the edge of the vineyard, where he could sleep in the afternoons.

He observed the lieutenant now as closely as he had watched him in the officers' mess at Camp Devens, and except for his reading the driest of books and writing letters home, and studying French with the lame notary public who was also school teacher and town clerk, McCann could not discover that he did anything at all. He did not avoid the four well-bred and good-looking girls

whose home he shared, but he never sought their company nor even walked with them beyond the limits of the yard. He got up when the first bugle blew, although he could have had his breakfast in bed at nine o'clock. He worried day and night and was so gloomy when he received word that the rest of the battalion had been sent out of Châtillon to join the First Army that McCann stayed near him all evening, missing his usual hours at the store or the café, in an effort to cheer him up.

## V

DURING the days they were stranded at Laferté, the lieutenant grew increasingly restless and could find less and less to do. The trucks and motorcycles, without which the main battalion would be almost helpless, failed to arrive. He could get no news of them. Often in the late afternoons, he would walk with McCann to the northern end of the village where the road turned sharply westward and dipped down the steep stony hill at the foot of which flowed the river for which the town was named. Miles of verdant countryside lay before them. Red roofs, clustered in the distance, slumbered in the sun. Fields of wheat and rye were already turning brown and the women had begun the harvest. When the air stirred, the fragrance of

the hay had come to them, and now and then an old man, struggling up the hill, would rest on the stone bench by the crucifix, half-way to the summit.

Near the small railroad station, where so few trains ever stopped, was an inn run by a half-grown boy and his grandmother. In spite of military regulations, Lieutenant Nichols asked McCann one day to have a bottle of beer with him, and they crossed the broad valley together on the dusty road and loafed for a while in the dark and musty tavern.

"Mac," the lieutenant said, "I feel ashamed of myself. Don't you?"

"Not so you'd notice it," said McCann. "I'm sitting on the world."

"I was thinking last night," the lieutenant went on, "that this department we're in is named for the Marne, the river which has been red with blood, which all the school children talk about. Do you realize that, Mac?"

McCann said nothing. He could not account for the lieutenant's inability to take things easy.

"I was sleeping under an eider-down puff. I could hear a mosquito. My nails were manicured. And somewhere the guns have been roaring for four long years, and the shells are exploding. Do you believe that, Mac?"

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"It sure looks peaceful here," McCann said. "It was more like war in Camp Devens."

"I'm going to do something about it, Mac. I know I am supposed to wait for orders, to do what I am told and let some one else do the thinking, but I can't do it. I'm going to Fays-Billot this very afternoon and tell the zone major he's got to get us our trucks and send us out of here," the lieutenant said.

"It's a long walk," McCann suggested.

"Perhaps I can borrow a bicycle," said the lieutenant. They returned to the village and Thérèse the oldest of the four sisters at the château, agreed to loan him hers. He had not ridden a bicycle for years, and was not even sure he could keep his balance, but as he tried it, in the grassy space in front of the château, he found he had not entirely forgotten. The bicycle had a skirt guard and no horizontal bar. The seat was low and the gear very small, so that his knees rose high with each turn of the pedals and his back was bent and his long nose pointed directly over the handlebars. The dust in the road caused him to veer from side to side. A few of the old men and women who were not working in the fields stopped to watch him.

In front of the barn, a group of men were loafing, and in trying to salute them, the lieutenant jammed the handlebars and fell headlong into an

archipelago of cowflaps. McCann came running from the château to help him to his feet and after brushing him a bit, started him again on his way. At supper time he had not returned, and when it came time for tattoo, McCann realized that the lieutenant would be away for the night. At once the aspect of the village changed.

VI

IN front of the café the bugler let go the first shrill note of tattoo when a fanfare of howls and cat-calls from the back room stopped him. At the same moment McCann appeared from the direction of the château, grinning.

"As you were," he said. "The lieutenant hasn't come back."

There was a small bar in the corner and the benches around the wooden tables were lined with the signal men who had been left behind. The widow who ran the place, with the help of a toothless and middle-aged relative from some neighboring village, came in from the kitchen to close the shop, as usual, but the men began to shout and pound upon the tables:

"Pas fini!"

"Encore vin blanc!"

"Officer parti. Taps caput."

“Where’s Trombla?”

From a corner, where he sat hunched up in a uniform much too loose for him and a cap that looked ridiculous from any angle, Corporal Trombla was shoved toward the madame. He was the only man who could speak French. He explained to the widow that the day was a big American holiday, and that Lieutenant Nichols had left orders that the bistrot was to be kept open all night. The widow was tired. Her feet hurt and her head ached from trying to understand a foreign tongue. But each evening she had taken in more money than ever before she had made in a month and was anxious to go on if there was no likelihood of trouble. She remonstrated, but the men would not budge, and before a half hour had passed they had drunk up all the beer and started in upon the wine, which ceased to taste bitter after three or four glasses. They clamored for food, but the widow had nothing in the house to cook for them, so Trombla and McCann started out to arrange a meal.

The sky was filled with stars and the low houses, ranged in a double row along the street, were like animals sleeping on their feet. The air was heavy with odors of phlox and manure and fresh-cut grass. They stopped in the grocery store, seeing a light there, and found Private Mahan, a Canadian lumberjack who had been several years

in the regular army and had missed going away with the battalion because he had been in the guard-house, and Horseshoer Smythe, a foundry worker of Scottish descent. Madeleine, looking wan and tired, was trying to talk with them. In a dim corner, with a wine bottle in his hand, sat Private Wallace, a tall, slim actor with curved eyelashes and a soft, well-modulated voice.

"Madeleine is all in," Wallace said. "Let's go over to the other place."

But Trombla and McCann continued on the road to the northern extremity of the village where a two-room plaster house with a small loft stood in one corner of a walled garden. The corporal banged on the gate. For some time there was no response, then the upper window was pried open and one shutter thrown back and a woman in her nightgown asked who was there. Trombla explained that they all wanted something to eat.

"At this hour, in the name of God?" she said, but grumblingly she prepared to dress and come down, for she had cooked meals for Trombla and his friends before and had been so well paid that she was willing to lose a night's sleep. Horseshoer Smythe arrived from the store with bottles under both arms.

"Has she anything to drink?" he asked, and

after Trombla had translated the question, Mme. Poulnot brought up two bottles of marc which she had been intending to save for the winter. It was good, she said . . . made of apples. The horseshoer took a sample swallow, choked and wiped the tears from his eyes.

Mme. Poulnot laughed. "It's strong," she said.

"I'll tell the world it is," Smythe replied. He took off his ammunition belt, being technically on guard duty, and sat on the bench beside her, helping her peel a large stack of potatoes and cut them up to be fried. Trombla and McCann went back to the wine shop, the noise from which could be heard all up and down the road. No one noticed them as they entered.

The kerosene lamps on two high wall brackets were dim and tobacco smoke streamed past their sullen flames. Over the bare walls and empty floor spaces, grotesque shadows were gesticulating. The men, unable to wait at the tables until the two old women could serve them, had pushed all the furniture to one side, and stood in a mass around the doorway, across which a counter had been made with one of the boards which ordinarily covered the billiard table. The pitch of their voices had mounted so that each one was shouting and no one made himself heard. Private Mahan, his massive head and shoulders higher than the rest,

held a roll of French bank-notes to the light and tried to count them. He had known many Canucks in the lumber woods, all of whom could speak a dialect of English, and he had never gotten over the idea that the villagers actually understood him better than they pretended.

The two women were working frantically, dropping coins and moist bills into an old pitcher, and Private Wallace, who became sadder with each drink, began to pity them and offered to help them serve the wine. They thought him distinguished, because of his good manners, and so he held bottle after bottle under the spigot while the widow made change and the other woman washed the bottles and glasses. Smythe came down from Mme. Poulnot's to borrow all the eggs the widow had. There were so few that he took McCann to Madeleine's place and banged on the shutters. Madeleine and her mother had been asleep an hour but the girl put on her clothes and opened the door. McCann knew where the eggs were kept and took one in his hand to show her what was wanted. She found a dozen and a half and put them in a basket.

About midnight, the crowd left the wine shop and piled into Mme. Poulnot's largest room, which served for kitchen, dining room and parlor. There were not enough dishes, so some of the men scattered to get their mess kits, singing duets and trios



through the village street and starting the dogs to barking again. Mme. Poulnot put a huge bread pan full of fried potatoes and a tureen of fresh string beans on the table and began cooking omelets as large as the frying pan would hold. Smythe poured marc into the mess cups and laughed as each man gagged on the first drink. The turmoil which before had been somewhat scattered through the village was concentrated within the garden wall, where the light from the cracks in the shutters shone on the plaster and played erratically upon rows of beans and heads of lettuce. Only Wallace could not seem to shake off his depression. From the doorway he saw the stars and the streak of white road and longed to be away from the noise and the smoke and the songs which strayed farther from the key as they increased in volume. He would have liked a quiet supper, with knives and forks, and companions who spoke in turn and listened to each other's wit. The more he drank, the worse he felt, so on the pretext of standing guard at the top of the hill, to warn them if the lieutenant should return, he slipped away and sat on the stone bench beneath the crucifix, with the valley spread before him, and above the distant trees which fringed the horizon the rim of the moon arose, casting long shadows across the roads and reflected

here and there in the winding river. He lost track of time as he sat there.

From the west, a train crawled slowly along the track, the smoke from its tiny funnel piling up like clouds in the moonlight. At first Wallace did not notice that it had stopped at the Laferté station, nor that a distant commotion had stirred by the tracks. But soon after the train went noiselessly on its way and disappeared into the shadows, he thought he saw a lean gray column lengthening along the road which led to the Laferté hill. He rubbed his eyes and stood erect beside the crucifix, his heart pounding. As he did so, he reasoned with himself that he was drunk, but the silver glow across the fields falsified the colors and as the seconds slowly passed he realized that troops were marching, two and two, approaching the old stone bridge which marked the center of the valley. He tried to control his fright, to explain what he saw in some rational manner, and was able to do so as long as he kept his eyes upon the moving line, but when he turned his back and started for Mme. Poulnot's to warn the others he began to run and to remember the sight in terms of greenish gray, the color of the uniforms worn by the prisoners he had seen. Wild-eyed and out of breath, he burst into the room where the others were still carousing. Mme. Poulnot screamed.

“The Germans are coming,” Wallace said.

“Let ’em come,” said the horseshoer, and every one roared and shouted.

When they saw that Wallace was in earnest, the big Canadian grabbed a spade that was standing in the corner and led the way through the door. Wallace hurried along beside him and the others straggled in the rear. McCann saw them stop suddenly, on the brink of the hill. In spite of the racket, the village was dark, but the moon had risen far enough to find the crevices between the houses and to flood the plain below. A column was actually moving on the road, and the leader had already reached the foot of the hill. Mahan, the spade still in his hand, ducked back into the bushes and the others followed suit, staggering with liquor but suddenly subdued.

The sound of feet in the dust, and of boots on the stones, came to them softly, then more insistently.

“Let them go by,” Mahan whispered, and then he caught sight of the first squad and began to roar.

“Germans, hell! They’re women,” he said. And McCann noticed at the same moment the skirts swinging from side to side as the newcomers marched.

From their hiding places in the bushes, the ten signal men watched them pass, and go on into

the village, and heard the command "Column right" in a female voice as the tallest of their number paused at the corner to look back to the end of the column and to read with a flashlight the sign by the roadway.

"I'm done soldiering," said Mahan, and threw the spade so hard into the earth that the handle stood up straight.

VII

AT six o'clock in the morning, the sound of a strange bugle aroused McCann from a drunken sleep. For a moment he was unable to recall what had happened before he had tumbled into his blankets, but as he peered out through the knothole in the barn loft he saw the strange company lining up in front of the mairie and heard the squads count off. In the street and the little lanes leading to the square, peasant women and children were gathered in curious groups. Except for the skirts which the newcomers wore, they were dressed like American soldiers, with overseas caps, olive drab blouses buttoned tight around the neck, wrapped leggings and square-toed army boots. As the roll was being called, one of the villagers drove a dozen cattle along the road from the direction of the château and the animals, confused by the crowd,

scattered and trotted this way and that. One of the yearlings bolted straight at the company.

Standing in the doorway, McCann saw one of the girls in the rear rank turn quickly and back away, and the tall woman who stood by as the sergeant called the roll strode angrily around to order the timid one back to her place and to chase away the heifer. The villagers laughed. Then the company was dismissed and reappeared in a few moments with mess kits. There were forty in the detachment, and each of them wore the orange braid of the signal corps. Private Wallace, who had spent the remainder of the night finding quarters for the women and explaining what he knew of the village to the woman lieutenant in charge, led them to the shed where the C Company mess had been set up when the battalion was there and the tired girls, who had slept less than three hours, drank coffee eagerly from their mess cups and munched upon the bars of chocolate the leader distributed.

After his own breakfast, McCann started for the château, although Lieutenant Nichols' bed was smooth as he had left it the night before. While he was cleaning a uniform he heard voices in the hallway and saw the doorknob turn.

"This one will do," the tall woman said. And

then, seeing McCann, "But there's some one here already."

Thérèse, wide-eyed and pale, was eyeing with polite distaste the boots the American girls were wearing. In French she explained that Lieutenant Nichols was away for the night, and a slender, sandy-eyed girl with the rank of sergeant translated the remark.

"I was told at Is-sur-Tille that there were no troops here," the lieutenant said, with just a shade of annoyance in her voice.

"That's what they think back there, madam," McCann said.

"Call me lieutenant," the woman said, as if she were weary of setting people right about it. Thérèse led them to another room, which she and one of her sisters had vacated.

"Bring my things here, Fahey," the lieutenant said to the third member of the party, a stout dark-haired Irish girl with broad hips and strong hands. Then they all went down the stairs, with Thérèse following bewilderedly.

Fifteen minutes later, McCann heard footsteps below and saw Mary Fahey shoulder a huge bedroll and start up with it. He went out to help her, but there was no way of passing her on the stairway and she seemed well able to carry on by herself.

“There,” she said, as she dumped the roll upon the floor.

“Where you from, buddy?” McCann asked, grinning.

“Oh, go to hell,” she replied, good-naturedly. As she set the room in order, they talked.

“The lieutenant’s sore because I’m afraid of cows,” she said. “I can’t help it. I never saw one running loose before. ‘What’ll the French people think of us,’ she says to me, ‘when an old lady of eighty years was driving a dozen of ’em.’ ‘We are not only soldiers,’ she says, ‘but the first American women our allies have ever seen. We must not only do as well as the men, but better than the men.’ She can go on like that for hours. But I like her, in a way. I haven’t seen any man put it over on her yet.”

“She’s not bad to look at,” McCann said.

“Don’t let her hear you say so,” Mary Fahey replied. “That will start her off again. She’s ashamed of being handsome. ‘I know that some of you are good-looking and well-shaped,’ she said to us when we started out, ‘but I warn you now to be careful. If a man cannot understand you are trying to serve a cause and respect you for it, have nothing to do with him. Love affairs must wait. We have more important things to do, and any one of you who risks being incapacitated for duty will be

dealt with like the cowards who shoot their own hands. I don't say this for any narrow moral or sentimental reason,' she said, 'but because the articles of war make it clear that the first duty of a soldier is to keep himself, or herself, in the best physical condition.'"

"She'll like Lieutenant Nichols," McCann said. "He hasn't any habits at all. Still, he's a good fellow, for an A.P.A."

"Shame on you, to be dogrobbing for a Protestant," she said. Then she continued: "She's taken a fancy already to the boy with the long eyelashes. It's funny how she picks out that kind. Feels safer, I guess. Still I don't think she's queer. It looked so at first, but I've been with her ten months and I'm convinced she's natural enough except for her ideas."

"Well, I guess I'll put in a little bunk fatigue," McCann said, yawning. "We were all on a drunk last night."

"You don't know where I can get some of those light wines and beer I've heard so much about?" asked Mary Fahey. "We're not allowed in saloons because it doesn't look right."

"I'll get you what you need," McCann promised, and headed for the barn to get a nap before noon.

At half-past eleven, when the sun was at its

height and the dust along the white roads hovered for yards in the air behind him, Lieutenant Nichols pedaled across the valley from the south and pushed his bicycle beside him as he climbed the long, stony hill. He saw three figures bending over shovels in the roadway and, although surprised that his men should be working without having been told to do so, because of the dust on his glasses and the sweat in his eyes, he did not notice the skirts until he was almost abreast of them.

The three girls saluted, and he shifted hands on the handlebars to reply, unable to get his breath or collect his wits.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"We were told to clean up the village, sir," one of them answered. In the square, other groups were working, deepening the gutters, sweeping around the pump, shoveling manure from the roadway into neat piles at regular intervals. At the driveway of the château he met Thérèse, dressed in black with her best boots on, as if for Sunday. She tried to make him understand something but he could not make out a word she said. So he went to his room to wash and dress for lunch. McCann hurried down to help him, acting purposely as if nothing had happened. From the head of the stairway he watched him going down.

Upon entering the dining room, the lieutenant

saw Madame Chernon and the four girls, all in black, and standing stiffly by their chairs, waiting for him, and as he approached the table a figure in olive drab he had not noticed in the dimness of the room came toward him. As he shook hands he was conscious first of a rather luxurious head of flaxen-colored hair, firm white teeth and lithe, athletic shoulders on which was one gold bar. The feeling of her hand first made him realize that he was face to face with a woman and an officer at the same time.

"Alberta Snyder is my name," she said. "I hope I haven't incommoded you, lieutenant."

"Not at all. My name is Sanford Nichols," the lieutenant said, trying to adjust himself to a situation he could not fathom.

"Do you speak French?" he asked.

"Not very well," she answered ruefully. "I must learn, right away," she said with determination, and then remembered her hostess was still waiting for them to sit down. "I beg your pardon," she said to Madame Chernon, and the latter, catching the last word, conveyed by a gracious gesture that it was quite natural she should greet her countryman in English. During the meal, little was said, except for polite remarks in French and attempts on the part of the Chernons to extend the vocabulary of their guests, but after lunch

Lieutenant Nichols took Miss Snyder to the garden, to show her the fields and vines, and there she explained her presence in Laferté.

In the sunlight, he saw the orange cord on her overseas cap.

"So you are in the signal corps, too, lieutenant," he said. McCann could hear their voices.

"We were trained for telephone work," she replied. "But so far we have been lucky. I was determined not to get stuck in some freight yard or commissary, miles back in the S.O.S. We want to see service, real service, but everywhere we go, it seems that nobody knows just what to do with us, and so we are sent somewhere else. We landed at Liverpool, camped there a month, and then were sent to Saint Nazaire. They had no quarters for women. They never have. So they sent us to Is-sur-Tille, in second-class cars where we didn't have room to stretch out as the men do in box cars. If they would only stop trying to favor us, we could get along. At Is-sur-Tille they told me this village had been vacated by some signal outfit and finally we got transportation. But what good does it do to be here? We are all ready for work. We have been ready for months. And nobody will have us."

The bugle sounded in the square.

"They're going out for drill," Lieutenant Sny-

der said. "But I guess I can trust Sergeant Mason."

"It's just as hard for me to get to the front," Lieutenant Nichols said. "I've been waiting weeks for orders. Our battalion has been attached to the First Army, but we have no tools to work with and no transportation. I'm stuck here with ten men, twirling my thumbs."

"If I were a man I would do something," Lieutenant Snyder said, and immediately was sorry, as she saw that Lieutenant Nichols' solemn face was turning red.

VIII

It was not for months afterwards that I understood why McCann had been so hesitant to tell me about Alberta Snyder and her detachment of women. Later, after the search for traces of her strange adventure had led me to so many lands, I was aware that he had been evasive at first and that his own enthusiasm and his casual acquaintance with me had caused him to tell much more than he had intended. In my own mind, the episodes at Laferté took a form more tangible than McCann's mere words could have indicated. The persons he evoked lived, thought and moved continually in my brain, and when a chance phrase of his confirmed one of my conclusions or opened up new trains of possibility I fitted the new details into

place and let their implications seep slowly in all directions.

The village of Laferté, I concluded, soon lost its haphazard and purely pastoral quality as the days went by.

A month before the women came, while the presence of four hundred and fifty signal men had somewhat changed its aspect, their activities had not been too formal and their lazy response to the summer sunshine had fitted them rather easily into the landscape, and had left no sharp impression of order. But the forty girls, directed and supervised from six in the morning until taps at ten o'clock by Lieutenant Snyder and her non-coms, functioned with the precision of a true military machine. Each morning the roll was called, the guard was mounted, and after breakfast and setting-up exercises, squads were detailed to police up the streets, sweep and disinfect the quarters, and for long hours the detachment was rehearsed in the drill they had long ago perfected, sent to distant hills to wave signal flags, lined up for tugs of war and games of pushball and taken on stiff hikes along the dusty roads. Frequently in the afternoon, they were marched to a secluded segment of the river and allowed to swim for twenty minutes.

Then in the early evening, just as the peasants

were coming in from the hay fields and the village shepherd was bringing back the sheep and distributing them in the various barns, they would march to the drill field just north of the village, with uniforms neatly pressed, boots greased and buttons shining, wearing their cartridge belts and empty holsters and with the Stars and Stripes flying at their head. Lined up in company front, the two tense ranks would stand at "Parade Rest" as the bugler played "Retreat," then Lieutenant Snyder would bring them back to attention and give the command "Hand Salute" as the strains of "To the Colors" resounded over the fields.

After the evening meal, the girls strolled in groups up and down the village street, talking with the villagers in the doorways, petting the dogs and caressing the children, but the ten remaining members of the 213th battalion stayed in the wine shop or crowded around the counter at Madeleine's store, complaining of the extra work they were forced to do and of the tightening of discipline. While the men were permitted to speak to the girls they could find no opportunity to do so privately. What worried Lieutenant Nichols and the others most was the fact that Private Mahan, after serving with the regulars in the Philippines and Mexico and having proven to be one of the best trouble shooters Major McGregor had been able


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to find, had been A.W.O.L. since the day the women arrived. He had said he was through soldiering and no one had seen him since. His pack and his blankets were missing, he had left his bunk in order. But he had disappeared, and at the end of ten days he would be a deserter.

Only McCann knew what was going on in both outfits, for Lieutenant Nichols told him all his worries and Mary Fahey, whom he called "Big Mary," chatted with him for hours at the château, when neither of the lieutenants was near.

"I used to sling hash in Childs's, on Boylston Street," she told McCann. "That's how I got roped into this outfit. My husband left me cold and Miss Snyder, who used to eat at my table every night, got me to enlist. I didn't know what I was getting into."

"She'll get us into trouble, yet," Big Mary said on another occasion. "She's crazy to be sent into the trenches. Thinks of nothing else, day and night. Some of the girls are beginning to kick because she works the shirts off of 'em and won't let 'em go near the men, but they're all so far from home they're afraid they'll never get back unless they stick by her. Most of 'em were hello girls and the rest are highbrows who want to do their bit. The only one I get on with is Sergeant Mason, the

Southern blonde. She's got brains, like the lieutenant, but she's not so anxious to make a name for herself. And she gets lit and cries, all by herself, whenever she gets a chance. She wants to get to the front, too, but I think she doesn't want to come back. She got stuck on some man who went off with a dancer."

The two lieutenants spent most of their time in the old battalion office, in opposite corners of the large and poorly lighted room which the lame notary had offered Major McGregor when the signal men first came to Laferté. Alberta Snyder was busy all day and sometimes far into the evening, making reports, planning the next day's schedule, inspecting, studying French, arranging for supplies, but she never went to Fays-Billot to ask for things directly, having been sent to Laferté from Is-sur-Tille and being afraid that if she showed herself to the officers of the advance section her outfit would be sent back to some port or railroad center. At all times she felt insecure, and was nervous when a courier came up the hill or the mail was brought to her, for she believed she had slipped through the network of officials all the way from England to the Haute Marne by a series of lax maneuvers on the part of busy clerks. Her objective had always been the trenches, but only now, when she seemed within striking distance of them,

or at least at a safe distance from the coast, did the passion for active service, for actual exposure of her body to the weather and the missiles, keep her feverish and restless, even in her sleep.

Lieutenant Nichols, ashamed of having so little to do, pretended to keep busy and tried to think of ways in which he could keep his ten idle men out of sight. He agreed that they should share the work of policing up the village, in proportion to their numbers, that they should stand guard every fifth day at the joint headquarters and that, during the hours the girls were swimming, they should be occupied at some distant point, but he could not order them not to talk with the girls and little by little he knew that the relations between the outfits were becoming less restrained. It was no less so with Miss Snyder and himself, I felt sure. They worked in the same room, slept in the same house and took their meals at the same table. Their problems were somewhat the same, and he found himself growing eager to help her and more in sympathy with her ideals. Behind the walls of the château, they walked and talked in the garden or beneath the trees and he grew to be so keenly aware of her fixed idea that she must undergo physical hardship and danger that he began to dread the disappointment which he felt sure must come. Instead of finding flaws in her arguments or taking

pleasure in the minor difficulties which her sex threw in her way, he began to agree with her and even to subscribe to hypotheses the unsoundness of which he was unable to ignore. His own situation seemed to be at a deadlock and gradually he had relinquished hope that it would be resolved, so his interest centered upon Miss Snyder's fate. He neglected writing home and stopped bothering the officers at Fays-Billot. In writing his mother, he had attempted to explain the presence of forty American women in the remote French village he had described without naming and it had proven so difficult that he had given up the attempt.

Alberta's beauty made him uneasy, at times, for her face was more attractive in her animated moments than it was in repose, and the more earnestly she talked the less attention he was able to pay to the text of her remarks. Her hair exuded a faint perfume and her dark blue eyes warmed and sparkled as she spoke of her dreams, and once in a while she would sit at the old piano in the front room of the château and sing Schubert songs, forgetting the English words, for she had learned them in German.

Her inability to speak French, and her laxity in having failed to study it on the other side was a continual source of embarrassment to her. She could not understand how she should have made

such an error. The months she had been training herself and the girls, she had been so thoroughly occupied and had had so many difficulties in arranging for their service in the A.E.F. that the fundamental need of being able to converse with the people among whom she was to find herself had escaped her. And no one had brought it to her attention. On the dock at Saint Nazaire, when she had heard the French sailors and longshoremen shouting at one another, she had flushed with shame and had been nearer to tears than at any other moment since her enlistment. But after a few days at Laferté, she was able to surpass Lieutenant Nichols and to carry on labored conversations at the table.

"She is very intelligent," Thérèse remarked to him one day, but the tone in which she said it disclosed that the French girl did not admire unreservedly the forceful American who was neither a woman nor a man, according to her standards.

"She could be terrible," Madeleine remarked to the boys in the store, when the girls were drilling in the square and Lieutenant Snyder was trying to extricate them after having run them up against the wall of the mairie. It was seldom she made a mistake. Still, Madeleine was impressed by the strength and vigor of the American girls.

One evening, after Miss Snyder had gone to her room, Lieutenant Nichols decided to take a

walk through the village. He could not sleep and the damp air drifting into his window from the orchard and the wine press and the hay stirred his melancholy feelings until it was impossible for him to remain indoors. In his moments of depression, it seemed to him as if he were a slacker, living uselessly at the expense of the hard-working old women and the absent young men of a stricken land. Miss Snyder's remark still lurked in his mind. If she were a man, he was convinced she would do something, that no military blunders could keep her in the background. He walked along the main street and absent-mindedly continued toward Mme. Poulnot's where, after passing the corner of the garden wall, he saw cracks of light and heard a muffled tumult of voices. The guard who should have been standing at the northern limit of the town was nowhere to be seen.

Surprised, Lieutenant Nichols stood in the roadway and a moment later some one threw open the door. Florence Mason, the slow-voiced sergeant, Big Mary Fahey, and five of his men, including McCann, were seated around the table, which was strewn with dishes and bottles. With his back to the doorway sat Private Wallace, who was supposed to have been on guard, his slender waist accentuated by the cartridge belt which was buckled tightly around him. Mme. Poulnot stood near by, aston-



ished and pleased that Miss Mason could make herself understood in French, and could drink marc without choking.

The door closed, leaving Lieutenant Nichols in darkness again, and he hurried back to the château in order to see nothing more, but as he did so he decided not to report what he had seen to Alberta Snyder for fear of upsetting her.

## IX

HAVING heard Lieutenant Snyder leave the house, McCann tapped on the door where Mary was working. He found the big Irish girl in tears.

"I never had a job before where I couldn't quit," she said.

"What's wrong?" asked McCann.

"I was fixing up her junk, just now, and I dropped the haversack. A little cardboard box fell out on the floor, one of those round ones the druggists use for pills, and as I was picking it up to put it back she opened the door. I never saw her so cut up about anything. 'Fahey, what are you doing with that?' she said, white as paper, and she grabbed the box out of my hand and tried the cover to see if I had opened it. 'Don't ever touch that box again, under any circumstances,' she said, but she

was trembling and had to sit down in the chair till she could get her breath. As if I cared what's in her boxes."

"I think Lieutenant Nichols caught on to our party last night," said McCann. "He read the riot act this morning about checking up on the bunks after taps. Said he would do it himself, from now on."

"To hell you say. Perhaps that's what's eating her," Big Mary said. "Aren't they a pair of crape hangers?"

"That's what they get their money for," said McCann.

He left Mary to finish cleaning the room and, as he was about to enter the office in the square, the French postman, who had long drooping mustaches and rode a special bicycle for one leg, stopped him and handed him a letter, asking questions which McCann could not understand. The envelope was addressed in French script, *M. Lieut. Nichols, Officier Américain, Laferté-sur-Amance, Haute-Marne*.

"It's for the boss," he said to the postman, who smiled politely as McCann pointed through the doorway in the direction of the adjutant's desk. Lieutenant Nichols opened it and found the inside to be typewritten and signed by Major McGregor.

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"Dear Nichols:

"There's no use waiting any longer at Laferté and it would be a waste of time to ask for moving orders from the Fays-Billot outfit. I worried two trucks out of the corps supply officer and am sending both of them to Laferté to pick up the kitchen and the other stuff we left behind.

"At Châtillon, the school was closed and so they sent us to Ligny-en-Barrois to join the First Army. It begins to look like business but we need every man we can get, so load your gang on the trucks, if there is room, and if not get a map and march over here. It's not too far, if you take it easy. I'm sending you an order through the American mails, but don't wait for it, if this comes first. I'm done with sitting around waiting for what I need. We've got some wire and pliers and a few picks and shovels and a big shipment of motorcycles has just got in to Marseilles so I sent my ten chauffeurs down there with an order straight from G.H.Q.

"I don't know what we're going to do about replacements, because about half of the boys have had flu or dysentery and instead of sending them back to us from the hospital, they shipped them all to some replacement camp before I could stop it and now we've lost track of them. Every week I send in a requisition for sixty men, but so far nothing has happened. Sergeant Horn is working

his head off, and everybody is anxious to get going. Throw away all the flags and buzzers. We'll have nothing but telephone work.

"By the way, Mahan blew in here the other day and said he'd gotten drunk and lit out for the front. If you've reported him A.W.O.L. I suppose we'll have to fine him a couple of dollars, otherwise forget it. I sure was glad to have another trouble man. He said Laferté was full of nurses or Y.M.C.A. girls or something of the sort. If that's the case, perhaps you can't tear yourself away.

"Come as soon as you can. Horn is having some Frenchman write the address so the French can read it.

"Sincerely,

"MCGREGOR."

McCann had never seen the lieutenant enthusiastic before. Alberta Snyder was not in the office, having taken the girls on an all-day hike, and in his excitement the adjutant tossed over the letter for McCann to read. The men were called together and under Corporal Trombla's direction started packing whatever battalion property had been acquired into boxes the cook had saved. Not a word was told them, but every one, including the villagers, sensed that they were about to move. McCann helped in the office, packing the two field desks with reports and rosters, boxing up the type-

writer, and taking the file of General Orders down from the wall.

At dinner that night, Lieutenant Nichols had intended to tell Alberta, but she seemed blackly depressed, eating almost nothing although she had been on the road all day. It was plain that she had something on her mind and Nichols could find no moment which seemed appropriate to break the news. After the meal was over, she tried to play and could not keep her mind on the music.

"Let's walk," she said.

They paced up and down, between the trees of the orchard, and from the bench beneath the back window watched the twilight deepen and the stars come out. McCann, who had been packing in the room above, had forgotten them and had settled down in the easy-chair for a quiet smoke when he heard their voices below. He had known for a long time that Lieutenant Nichols was falling in love with Miss Snyder and, while it made his chief more human in his eyes, he believed from what Mary had said that his lieutenant would find the tall blonde a rather cool proposition.

"I want to tell you what I've done," she said, finally. "If it affected me alone, I should not care, but to-day it came over me so vividly that the lives of all these girls are in my hands and that I must be very sure of myself.

“You know the rosters we have to make out, each week and each month. Before our company was incorporated into the signal corps for telephone work, there had never been any women on the payrolls, and so we were given the old grades with an ‘f’ in parentheses. They did the same with the yeomen in the Navy. A private is a private (f), a corporal is a corporal (f), and so on.

“When we got as far as Laferté, and it seemed that we really might get to the front, I dropped the (f) from our records and sent the roster to Fays-Billot just as yours is worded. They have said nothing about it. I don’t believe they have noticed the difference. What few names there were that could not pass for men’s names, I altered,—just a letter or two. They have never seen us. I am sure they think that forty men are waiting here to be attached to some service unit. If I am caught, I don’t care at all what happens to me, but if we should be sent to the front, like any other soldiers, and one of these girls should be killed, I think sometimes I should feel like a murderer.”

“But suppose she were taken prisoner?” Lieutenant Nichols said.

Alberta clenched her hands angrily, but her voice became scornful as she went on.

“So you repeat the same old phrase! I have heard it from my mother and my father, from all

the men who tried to make love to me, from the righteous and the lecherous and the mild. Suppose I am captured. I know what you think. Probably you are right. I am sure you would rape the first German woman who came into your hands. So would your orderly, and all the others."

McCann laughed so loudly that he was afraid they had heard him. "God help the German who tried to rape her," he thought.

"Everywhere along the line I have come up against that notion," she went on, but seeing Nichols was stung by her words she softened the tone, almost as if she were talking to a child. "I do not intend to be beaten by a technicality. Whatever I think about the actual danger, I am willing to take a sporting chance, to agree in advance that I shall not be captured, as the brave women in the Russian death battalion have done. I have brought a box of prussic acid tablets."

She caught her breath, like a sob, and Nichols stepped toward her, raised his arm, then dropped it again.

"There is another question which worries me more than rape," she said, very earnestly. "I can do as I like with my own life. But to-day I found Mary Fahey with that box of poison in her hand. I don't think she knows what it is, and surely she

does not suspect what it was intended for, but when I thought of her, an honest Irish girl, who thinks silence would doom her forever, I was almost my soul made me hypocritical, disowned all my meaning. We have to fight that, too, for it is almost universal of us.

"Do any of these girls know what we are fighting for? Have they the slightest conception of what their example might mean to them as well as mankind? Or is this but an adventure, a sort of thing before they settle down to raising children? Do any of them think of the past or the future?"

"I am sure my men don't," Lieutenant Nichols said, with Miss Peabody's crowded kitchen in mind.

"Not as you'd notice it," thought McCann, as he made ready to slip away quietly. Again he was pained to think the Lieutenant was so fresh.

"Well," Lieutenant Nichols continued, "I don't recommend the women, perhaps. No one in the world's camp is equipped for hand-to-hand fighting. Heaven knows what the result is like. I have never heard two women do a deed."

"The engines are not equipped for fighting either, but they were given that promise and ought to be able to overcome them," we are told," Albert replied.

"As my men, I shall give the girls no more

chance to back out. To-morrow morning, I shall ask them as they are lined up for roll call whether or not they actually want to go into the lines, if they have a chance. I shall say that it may lie with me to decide. I shall give them ten minutes to think it over, and then as I call their names I shall ask those who are willing to risk their lives or to take human lives themselves to step two paces forward."

The bugle in the morning woke McCann in his loft. Wide awake, he jumped to his feet and looked through the knothole as he heard the sound of the women lining up in front of the mairie. He saw Lieutenant Snyder step out to face them and begin to speak, although he could not make out a word she said. Then she took the roll from Sergeant Mason's hand and motioned the Southern girl to take her place at the company's right.

"Sergeant Mason, Florence!" The name was called so sharply that it carried to the barn.

The slender sergeant moved two paces to the front and stood at attention. One by one, as their turns came, the other girls stepped forward until the roll call was finished.

X

LIEUTENANT NICHOLS sat at his empty desk in the corner of the room, facing the square, still

dreading to tell Alberta that he had been ordered to rejoin the battalion. The walls on his side of the office were bare, two field desks and a packing case of papers and office supplies were piled near the doorway. Before Alberta had completed her morning round of inspection, however, a motorcycle from Fays-Billot sputtered into the village and stopped in front of the headquarters. The driver dismounted, took some papers from the pocket of his blouse, and entered, saluting.

"Is Lieutenant Snyder here, sir?" he asked.

"The Lieutenant is somewhere around the town," Lieutenant Nichols answered.

"I have an order for him. Casual Company No. 356, telephone. Is that the outfit?"

"Yes. You may leave it on the desk," Lieutenant Nichols said. The private saluted and tore off again on his motorcycle, narrowly missing the frightened chickens and causing the villagers to pop their heads through windows and doorways, astonished by the noise and sudden streak of dust.

A few moments later, Alberta Snyder entered. The bleak walls and the packing cases caused her to stop short.

"There's a message for you," Lieutenant Nichols said. His throat was dry from nervousness and he saw her hand tremble as she tried to tear open the sealed dispatch. The import of the message

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escaped her for a second, then she sat down quickly, the paper fluttering in her hand.

"It's come," she said. And she read the message again. "The 213th Field Signal Battalion, at Ligny-en-Barrois."

"Why, that's your battalion," she said, and handed over the dispatch to Lieutenant Nichols.

"From H.Q., A.S., S.O.S., Fays-Billot, Haute Marne  
"To Commanding Officer, Casual Company No.  
356 (telephone)

Laferté-sur-Amance, Haute-Marne.

"You will proceed at once on foot to Ligny-en-Barrois, reporting there to the Commanding Officer, 213th Field Signal Battalion, 5th Corps, 1st Army. The men will wear full marching equipment. Motor transportation will be sent from these headquarters for heavy baggage."

Not knowing what to say, Lieutenant Nichols gave her Major McGregor's letter, his face suffused with misgivings he tried his best to hide. Already, he foresaw the spectacle he would afford in marching into Ligny with forty women as replacements for a signal outfit about to go into the lines. His elation at prospects of active service began to slip away, and at the same time he could not help responding to Alberta's joy. For she was thinking quickly. All along, she had been afraid that even in

case she should be ordered to the front, if she started across country with forty girls, some officer would question her orders and stop her. With an escort of signal men, headed by the adjutant of the battalion she was about to join, her chances were infinitely better. She had learned the fondness of army men for passing on troublesome responsibility and she knew that any busy officer they encountered, no matter how strange the proceeding appeared, would in all probability conclude it was up to Lieutenant Nichols and decide to mind his own business. The prompt response her girls had made to her question that morning had dispelled her qualms, in a measure. She realized that after Sergeant Mason's example, it would have been difficult for any of them to refuse, that the dramatic quality of the situation had stirred their hysterical impulses, but she was convinced it would have been the same with a company of men, that all war activity was based upon a similar kind of fervor and that Lieutenant Nichols was taking the same sort of responsibility in trying to get his men into the danger zone. But still she waited for him to suggest that they should start out together, and already he was finding reasons for doing so. After all, she had bona fide orders from headquarters. Major McGregor, he had no doubt, would raise a howl which would be heard from one end of Ligny to the other,



but in that case it would fall upon the major to administer to Alberta her final disappointment and he would have done his best to respect her ardent wish for service.

Sergeant Mason passed the doorway and Alberta called to her. With the rather indolent grace which characterized her movements, however military, she stepped inside, saluted her superior and then Lieutenant Nichols. In spite of her punctilious observance of army etiquette, the adjutant was aware of a glimmer of amusement in her large and almost credulous eyes. Once in the dusk, at the Brest barracks, Nichols had seen McCann salute a passing colonel and had noticed that his thumb had fallen considerably below the forehead. He suspected that this capable Georgia girl, who Lieutenant Snyder had said was much more intelligent than she liked to appear, might enjoy the same gesture in a good-natured way.

"We are going to move, sergeant," Lieutenant Snyder said. "Call the company together and see that the quarters are in good condition to be vacated. There will be no drill to-day, and no strenuous work, as we have a long march ahead. Privates Fahey and Nordstrom will help the cook get the field kitchen ready and Corporal Ray will help you supervise the packing."

In the afternoon, a truck arrived from Fays-Billot. The equipment of the telephone company had been boxed up and stacked by the kitchen and all the girls were out of sight, policing up their quarters. Private Wallace and Horseshoer Smythe were standing near by and Lieutenant Nichols told them to load on the boxes, which took but a few moments. The field kitchen was hitched on, like a trailer, and the chauffeur started down the hill, as Lieutenant Snyder left the driveway of the château.

"I took the liberty of loading your equipment on the truck," Lieutenant Nichols told her, and without expressing her gratitude directly, she showed her relief and appreciation of his act, for it had forestalled any possibility that the driver might remark that an outfit of women were on the way. The two trucks from Ligny arrived a few hours later, the drivers greeting Madeleine enthusiastically at the store. They had heard rumors that Laferté was full of American girls and watched eagerly as the telephone company formed for retreat and marched at sundown to the drill field.

"Pretty soft for you guys," they said to Smythe and McCann.

"This is some army," the horseshoer said.

That night, in spite of the fact that the girls had been warned to rest, the usual group had a final dinner at Mme. Poulnot's who gave them her

last bottle of marc and filled their canteens with red wine. Both outfits had been told, after the trucks had left, that they were to start out together. Big Mary Fahey, Florence Mason and Juanita Ray, Corporal Trombla, Horseshoer Smythe, McCann and Wallace, the actor, sat around the old wooden table, eating, drinking, and talking incoherently in tones which grew louder and more hilarious as the hours passed by.

"We ought to have invited Madeleine to the party," the actor said.

"Go get her," urged Florence Mason. So she and Wallace tiptoed to the store, tapped on the shutters and finally made themselves heard. The drivers of one of the trucks from Ligny had brought her news of Sergeant Horn, so Madeleine was sleeping lightly. She dressed, after consultation with her mother, and after a glass or two of wine, became as gay as any of them, toasting America and France and the success of the Allies in French which even the horseshoer seemed to understand with little difficulty.

In the meantime, at the château, where Mme. Chernon sat politely with them in the drawing room, Alberta Snyder and Lieutenant Nichols pored over road maps, deciding which route they should take and where they should stop the next night. The whole thing seemed more and more

unreal to the adjutant, as if some sort of farce had drawn him in so far he could not escape, and while his affection for Alberta had gotten to the point where it nagged him continually for expression, he realized that never had her mind been so far from her personal affairs. When she had been troubled, she had seemed nearer to him. Now, with practical problems before her, she was impossible to approach. He felt as if her will was swaying him, was leading him to a ridiculous climax, and his sense of ineffectuality returned. Again he was hopelessly sidetracked.

In the morning, with the villagers gathered round to say farewell, the detachment formed in the square, and marched down the long hill, two and two, their packs between their shoulders, arms swinging, hobnails thumping on the stones. They passed the stone bench and the crucifix, where Mary Fahey made the sign of the cross, tramped over the old bridge beneath which the dragon flies darted, stirred the dust of the long white road to the railroad tracks and turned toward the east and into the silent hills.

Behind them, the village of Laferté shimmered on the highest hilltop, its red roofs clustered beneath the venerable trees, and the old women, shaking their heads sadly, went back to their hay-fields, and the old men and young boys clucked and

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shouted to the horses and went about the affairs of life.

In the cool château, in the drawing room, Thérèse was crying, her head in her mother's lap, and Mme. Chernon stroked her hair and tried to comfort her, knowing there was nothing she could say and that whatever befell the strange Americans who had gone away, the men her daughters might have married had been killed, or would be killed, and that nothing could be done about it all.





PART TWO



*The Archives*



MY contact with McCann was broken off suddenly, at the point where his narrative had intrigued me most. The impending death of one of my few remaining relatives, which later occurred while I was on the steamer, caused me to throw up my job and leave Paris on a day's notice. The fact that the editor had excused me from giving the customary notice made it necessary for me to work up to the last minute and to spend some hours after press time in explaining certain details to the friend I had induced to take my place. As soon as I could get away, I rushed to the little market café, but McCann had been there, the patron said, and after waiting two hours had left, saying that he had a headache. I had not the slightest idea where he lived, so I took the boat-train in the morning regretfully, hoping that by some means I could get in touch with him again and learn the fate of those persons in whom he had aroused my interest so keenly and whose existence had become so vivid to me during the long hours of the winter nights I had spent in listening to his reminiscences.

As I lay in my steamer chair, watching the

huge waves bearing down upon us, then receding, I found my mind constantly reverting to the members of the 213th Field Signal Battalion, shunted here and there on the war-stained map of France, and particularly to Alberta Snyder.

During the few weeks I spent in Boston I must have impressed the family lawyer as being unusually distraught, for his questions more often than not found my mind in the little café, in an atmosphere of smoke and tranquillity, absorbing the details I have just related.

My plans for the future have always been uncertain, and they were no less so then. When the last notice had been posted and the final document signed, I found myself without work and with little ready cash. A friend of mine, who had become quite hard of hearing since I had seen him in pre-war days, had a house on Cape Cod, at South Orleans, and helped pass the time by making occasional surveys in some of the quaint adjoining townships. It was about the middle of March, some weeks before the Cape would be invaded by the vacationists, and since he was unable to make a survey without help, he suggested that I spend a month or two with him, and act as rodman.

The prospect pleased me, for I was fond of the bleak fields, the bogs, and wind-swept beaches on the Cape and the old Massachusetts towns with

rickety wharves and leisurely sea-faring inhabitants. Bard Johnstone and I had been intimate in school, and I knew we should not bore one another, even though it was necessary for me to raise my voice in order to converse with him. So one Saturday morning, with a suitcase full of old clothes and a dozen good books, I took the train with him and, after winding through the mud flats and skirting the coves of Quincy, settled down in my seat to watch the land and occasional glimpses of sea and of tidal rivers drifting slowly backward from the car-sides. The stations were not far apart and at each one of them a few of the passengers got off, so that by the time we had reached our destination, the conductor was chatting with us from the seat ahead, for want of other company.

"Lide Wetherby's back," the conductor said to Bard. "She's living in her mother's old house next to you."

Bard did not catch the name, but he smiled and nodded as if he had understood, and since I had never before heard of Lida Wetherby I paid little attention to the remark. We drove from the Orleans station down the South Orleans road in the postmaster's rig and opened up the old house, the windows of which had been boarded to protect the glass from winter storms. It was a snug, solid cottage, with oak rafters and clapboards which had

turned gray without ever having been painted. In the living room was a broad fireplace, and while I started the range and unpacked the groceries Johnstone built a brisk fire, with the extraordinary care and deliberation he used upon all his tasks. When it started to burn, he went to the window on the south side of the cottage and noticed a light in the house next door, which was fully a quarter of a mile away.

"Oh," he said. "Lida Wetherby's back. It just now came to me what the conductor said."

"Who's Lida Wetherby?" I asked.

"She owns that house down the road. Lida married some army officer, years before I came here, but I don't know what happened to him."

While Johnstone had lived on the Cape a long time, he was essentially a man of city habits. He liked being alone, in order to avoid the strain of having to read people's lips and of trying to follow scattered conversations, but no matter how long he stayed in the country, he read until after midnight each evening and slept until the sun was high, going to the mail box on the gatepost for his newspaper before he sat down to breakfast. My own sudden change from night work in a crowded city room to long hikes in the sand with a rod and steel tape in my hand made my legs ache comfortably at night and the dancing light of the wood fire and



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kerosene lamp put me to sleep soon after supper. The result was that I woke very early each morning and had several hours to myself before Bard stirred. We did not pretend to work until the afternoon.

The salt air and sparkling sunshine revived me and each time I went to the village store the old sailors who congregated there would tell me the tales they had told one another so many times. A half mile east of Johnstone's cottage was the shore, and during the winter the carcass of a whale had been washed up there, so I used to walk over to watch the gulls wheel over and perch upon the huge skeleton which the breakers and sea birds had picked almost clean.

One morning, I took the road to the south where I had heard there was a fresh-water pond full of perch, and in passing the house which Johnstone had indicated to me the afternoon we arrived I saw a woman bending over a flower bed which she had planted in an old dory, half-buried in the ground. As she straightened up, she saw me and I bowed. She was tall, with white hair and stately shoulders, and her eyes showed constant suffering. She said, "Good morning," and asked me about Mr. Johnstone, and as she was speaking it occurred to me that she was Lida Wetherby. I had expected to see a pert young person, who had scandalized her

neighbors in some way, instead of this regal woman of sixty, wrapped in a cream-colored shawl.

As I passed on, reluctantly, since I could think of nothing to say to her, I noticed in one of her windows, in front of a drawn curtain, a card with one gold star. Each day, after that, I saw her working in the yard or standing on the rise of ground from which she could see the ocean, and I found myself contriving to see and speak to her. Before very long no subterfuge was necessary. I walked down to her place after my own quick breakfast and sat with her, well wrapped in my overcoat, in the swing in her front yard, or we walked together to the beach where the gulls roosted on the gaunt frame of the whale. We talked about general things which gradually, as a matter of course, became personal. She seemed to have a horror of her house, once she had stepped out of it. I knew from the first that she had some overwhelming sorrow. The vibrations of it reached my nerves whenever we were together, but I asked no questions and got no clew as to its nature until on one occasion, as we were sitting in the swing, I mentioned Paris and began to speak of how the city came to life in the spring, about that same time of year,—of the buds and the gardens and the boats upon the Seine.

She winced, but immediately asked:

“Then you have been in France?”

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"Yes. I went over the first time during the war," I replied. Her agitation confused me, and caused me to make the one remark which was the least tactful under the circumstances, but I thought of the gold star and of Johnstone's having said she had married an army man and my mind jumped at the natural conclusion.

"Was your husband in the A.E.F., also?" I asked, and was sorry before the question was half formulated, but too late to stop it.

She closed her eyes, in a brave effort to control herself.

"No, he wasn't," she said, and the tears came quietly from beneath her quivering lids, although by remaining perfectly still and failing to breathe she kept herself from sobbing.

"You will excuse me," she said, and turned to go into the house.

I sat a moment, paralyzed with shame and embarrassment, and then went away.

## II

THAT afternoon Johnstone and I were trying to locate some house lots which bordered upon the ocean and a good part of which had been washed away since the deed had been executed. While he searched for corners and referred again and again to the map, I sat in the sand trying to recover from

my dismay at having so disturbed Lida Wetherby. On the way home, I asked Bard about the man she had married, in order better to understand in what way I had blundered.

"Wetherby is her maiden name," he explained. "She married some man who later became a brigadier-general. Snyder, I believe, was his name."

"Snyder," I exclaimed. "And was he killed? I notice she has a gold star in her window."

"No. I think she left him. They lived in Washington while the war was going on. The star is for her daughter. Nobody around here knows exactly what the story is. Her daughter was a nurse, in France, or something like that, and never came back. Lida keeps pretty much to herself, and she never mentions her loss."

As he spoke, I could feel my heart pounding. The transit I was carrying seemed suddenly heavy and my legs were weak. McCann's description of Alberta Snyder, even his unconscious imitation of the inflections of her voice, suggested Lida Wetherby and, while I could scarcely grasp the fact that Alberta was dead, and surely could not picture her as a nurse, it startled me after the weeks she had existed like a ghost in my brain to learn that I had been talking with her mother in the flesh.

After supper, in spite of the fact that my mind

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was making spasmodic efforts to assimilate what I had just surmised, the firelight started me to dozing and quickly drove me to bed; but I awoke soon after midnight, excited and apprehensive, for while I knew that I should go at once to Lida Wetherby, I could not decide what to tell her or how to make her feel at ease after my blunder of the day before. If McCann had known that Alberta had been killed or had died of disease, I felt sure he would have told me. I got out of bed and dressed, and as I stood by the window I noticed a light in the Wetherby house and realized that Lida was waiting for morning. Whatever resignation she had achieved my thoughtless remark had shattered. It seemed as if I could not face her, nor risk more damage to her peace of mind, no matter how great was my curiosity or my desire to make amends.

From my upstairs window I could see a dark segment which was the sea and the occasional glint of starlight or phosphorus upon the water. Clumps of bushes and sharp-pointed evergreens began to be more distinct upon the fields which lay between me and the shore and, as the darkness was diluted at the eastern horizon and drifted westward like thinning smoke, the light in the window of the house down the road became paler and then suddenly was snuffed out. The morning chorus of birds began, and swelled into an almost raucous

clamor. I went downstairs to make coffee, walked shivering to the shore and followed the beach for miles northward and back again, and my watch said seven o'clock. It was still too early to take the southern road, but as I reached the summit of the knoll I caught a glimpse of Lida Wetherby's shawl and saw her standing on her back porch. She must have seen me at the same moment and also she must have understood something of my feelings, for she started walking in my direction and I went forward across the fields to meet her.

Although she had not slept, she did not shrink from the topic she knew was on my mind as well as hers.

"I am very sorry I acted so stupidly yesterday," she said, looking me serenely in the eye. "The service star in my window is for my daughter, who was also in France. I don't know what happened to her, but after making all the inquiries possible and getting no satisfaction, I let my neighbors believe she was dead, to stop their everlasting questions. I do not believe Alberta is dead and I will never believe it until it is proven to me. There are a thousand ways in which her disappearance might be explained. She was a willful girl, a girl of high spirit. She had more energy than she knew what to do with, and did not understand the ways of the world very well. The war excited her, as it excited all the

young people, only more thoroughly in her case because it was the first outlet for her eagerness to live which had always worried me so much. . . .”

She stopped suddenly, seeing upon my face an interest more intense than she had reason to expect, and faltered.

“Did you know her?” she asked, quickly.

The sudden fear which came over her impressed me in time to make me cautious.

“I met a soldier in Paris who had seen her in one of the villages,” I said. “Laferté-sur-Amance.”

I was undergoing a mental revolution on my own account after having spent the night resigning myself to Alberta Snyder’s death and then finding out abruptly that her mother knew as little, perhaps not as much, as I about her fate. My first impulse was to tell her all I had heard from McCann, but her tremulous receptivity to even the slightest hope steeled me to a self-control I might not otherwise have had. Each moment that I refrained from giving her all the information at my disposal, I was resolving to do my utmost to follow it up and to do her a greater service later without subjecting her to unbearable suspense.

“Laferté-sur-Amance,” she repeated. “That must be the village she wrote me so much about, although she never could mention the name because of the censorship.”

We had been walking back toward her house, as we talked, and soon were seated in the swing. Now that the subject had been opened, I saw that she was disposed to talk, and I felt no qualms about encouraging her to do so.

"How did your daughter happen to go to France?" I asked. "The man I talked with told me she was in the signal corps."

"She was crazy to go, and she wouldn't hear of being a nurse or a social worker," Lida Wetherby said. "'No class of women are more abject than nurses,' she said to me, once. 'They are successful only in so far as they are subservient.' Alberta was quite bitter, sometimes, about the men, and even more so about women who fawned upon them. She had the strength and brains of a man, and every way she turned she found some handicap or other. I think she always disliked her father, and I can't say I can blame her much. I remember how she used to look at him and then at me as if to say, 'How could you have brought such a man into our family?' Although he was no worse than most of the rest of them.

"When the war broke out, Alberta was studying music for want of anything better to do. At least, she seemed to find no discrimination there and her teachers all told her that her voice was worth cultivating. I never believed that her heart was in



it, but the only way was to let her go ahead and find out for herself. Even before America got mixed up in the fighting, Alberta tried to go across as an ambulance driver, but they wouldn't let her. Then my husband was promoted two or three times, like all the old army men, and we went to Washington. When he got to be a brigadier-general, Alberta wrote him the first real letter she ever had sent him, thinking that he might go to France and make something of himself. She was in Boston at the conservatory then, and she came to Washington especially to see him in his new uniform. When she got there, he was not at home, although it was Sunday, and she was pleased that he was working overtime, so she went down town to his office to surprise him, and found him with his stenographer in his lap, and such a scrawny little girl, the very kind Alberta couldn't stand.

" 'Great Heavens, child,' I said to her, 'do you think that bothers me? He's been carrying on with somebody or other for the last twenty years.' I didn't mind, because he left me more or less to myself, and I suppose in a way it was my own fault because after Alberta was born I hardly gave him a thought. But she was so full of ideas that she had never noticed what was going on around her. The whole country throwing itself into one great effort had caught her imagination, poor girl, and then she

found her father with his hair all ruffled up and his desk littered over with bills of lading, with a schoolgirl calling him 'Daddy' and fumbling with his mustache. It broke Alberta all up. She wanted me to leave him, then and there.

"Alberta didn't say a word to any one but me, but she knew he had a lot of friends among the officers and politicians and so she held it over him until she got permission to organize a crowd of telephone girls and got herself in the army. He didn't dare to cross her, after that. She made up her mind she was going across and nothing could stop her."

I was as much impressed by Lida Wetherby's candor as I had been previously by her reticence. She spoke deliberately, and there was no malice in her tones as she told me about her life with the general, the succession of army posts in the Middle West, the Philippines, and Alberta's birth in a brick cottage on an island in Boston harbor. I tried to conceal my eagerness, since I was afraid it would cause her to withdraw her confidence. Alberta had been her constant companion, until she had entered the conservatory, and she had talked with her as if she were an adult even before she was out of short dresses. She had been large for her age, and precocious. All her sufferings or triumphs her mother had shared.

I realized right away that the tragedy for Lida Wetherby was deeper even than the loss of her daughter, for they had parted in the midst of their first serious misunderstanding. Alberta's thirst for adventure, her glorification of what a man might find in life, had stirred no response from the mother. Neither had Lida been able to be thrilled by the future of women or the possibilities of open companionship between the sexes.

"I told her," Lida Wetherby said to me, "that some day she must be entangled with a man, to convince herself it was no good. God knows women have idiocies enough which come natural to them without being drawn besides into those laid out especially for men. Let them shoot each other, and wear spurs in the house, I said to her. Let them hem and haw about their stupid business. Let them dress up on Fourth of July and bellow. Let them believe you are all goodness and mystery. But in heaven's name don't ape them. They want just one thing from you, child, and what a performance *that* is!

"But she couldn't believe the world is as it is. And perhaps, because I ridiculed her dreams, she blames me with the others.

"'Our chance is coming,' Alberta said to me, and lost her temper when I pooh-poohed the notion. She was determined to show up her father, as if that were necessary."

I could only listen, gratefully, and be glad that I had been thrown in the way at the moment Lida chose to unburden herself. I tried to convey by my attitude that I made no great claims for my sex, least of all for myself. As we were talking, Bard Johnstone came slowly down the road, looking back now and then to make sure no vehicles were coming up behind him.

"What do you two find to talk about?" he asked, and she dropped the subject of Alberta and shouted commonplace remarks to Bard until it was time for me to start preparing lunch.

III

It was the next morning that Lida showed me Alberta's letters, and the sight of her handwriting on Y.M.C.A. paper gave me such an uncanny feeling that I handled the documents gingerly, as if they had been fragile with age. They were of such an intimate nature that at times I felt I had no right to read them further. Yet her mother was anxious for me to read each word, as if in no other way I could arrive at an appreciation of the profundity of her grief and indignation.

"I understand very well," she said calmly, "the men who place bombs in public buildings and assassinate public officials. I should be willing to do so myself. I cannot tell you the number of offices

in which I have sat, nor of the glib way in which each man contrived to pass me on to some one else. In Washington they tell me it will be years before the records can be properly gathered and filed."

I realized that she meant what she said, literally, that she had enacted scenes of sabotage in her lonely house at night, when a northeast storm beat in from the sea or the cannon boomed from the life-saving station. I could well understand her refusal to believe Alberta was dead, because I shared the same conviction.

The first of the letters, in ordinary envelopes, and showing occasional tatters where the censor had snipped out a word or a phrase with the shears, told of Alberta's stay in Liverpool and Saint Nazaire and of her days at Is-sur-Tille, although none of these places was mentioned because of orders. The fact that Alberta knew her messages were to pass through the hands of an officer who was acquainted with her and who was especially curious because of her odd status, kept her from writing freely. She expressed perfunctory good wishes for her mother and repeated assurances of her good health, but the last series, begun at Laferté, had been sent in blue envelopes she had saved for weeks for the purpose and had not been censored. They had been mailed in sections, but apparently at the same time and, remembering McCann's having said

that she was ordered to Ligny-en-Barrois, I had no difficulty in identifying the locality.

"My dear mother," a letter began. "I do not know whether any or all of this will reach you or whether, when I have so many things crowding my mind, I shall be able to write coherently enough to give you an idea of what is happening to me. So many times each day I feel a pang of regret that you are unable to share the sunset or the shadow of a cloud or a column of tired French artillery trudging patiently down a dusty road, the men dozing upon their horses and the guns streaked and spotted with gray. 'The Frogs,' our soldiers call them, almost with contempt sometimes, and I want to weep whenever I see middle-aged grocers and shopkeepers with patched and faded uniforms, too tired to wonder which front they will be sent to next, with no rest in sight unless they are wounded and hospitals more frightful than the trenches. I think when they pass by that I never have seen soldiers before, that the boys you see marching through the streets with bands to play for them and speeches before each city hall are playing a game of some kind. Not that I have seen war yet, but there are Americans who have.

"When we were shipped across France, in second class cars which were built so that if we wanted to sleep we had to stick our feet in some-

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body else's face, we stopped early one morning at a station on the edge of a fairly large city. I left the car to stretch my legs and found myself in the midst of a lot of boys who had just come from Château-Thierry. They were shaving by the carsides, their faces all spotted with lather, and each white mask was stained with blood where their hands had slipped. When I spoke to them, they acted sort of dazed and their eyelids trembled. Then an engine let out a snort, and one of them jumped into the air and yelled in terror. Half of them dropped their razors or their cups to the cinders. Our train pulled out soon afterwards, but that row of blood-stained lather faces stuck in my mind and made me realize more than anything I had seen that somewhere the war was going on.

"How brave the French women are. I want to leap from the train, sometimes, to put my arms around them as they lean on their pitchforks and watch the troop trains crawl through their fields. I know you are anxious about me, and that all the mothers of our soldiers are suffering, after a fashion, but when I see a peasant woman as old as you are climb up on a load of hay or drive out to gather the harvest, as if it were an act of God that rain and wars should come, I am ashamed of pitying Americans.

"I don't know who is right. I am less con-

vinced than ever about what we call our cause, but I am so sure that France is worth fighting for that it gives me inspiration to go on. I don't mean to be hysterical, but I am near the real scene and I mean to get nearer, and whatever happens, mother dear, I want you to know it has been worth while. I am not afraid of what may happen. I am much more worried for fear nothing will happen, that I will be sent back to some port or warehouse to do work that any moron could do much better.

"I cannot tell you where I am now, save to say that the town is entirely deserted, except for a few outlying farmhouses. A railroad cuts through the center of the village, but no trains appear and the tracks have started to rust. As I write, three airplanes in V formation are wheeling out across the sky and when the wind shifts I can hear the drone of their motors. They are French planes, no doubt, although I don't know how I should recognize a German flier if I saw him. I have been told that the sound of the motor is different, but so many of them fly captured French planes that one can never be sure. The public buildings and the group of houses near them were taken over by the Americans some time ago but whatever troops had been here got away before we arrived. I never walked so far in my life before, but after the first two days I didn't mind it much and the girls stood it almost



as well as the men. Juanita Ray, who just doesn't seem built for walking, lay down by the roadside and went so sound asleep we couldn't rouse her, and in order to keep the others from getting lax I had to roll her into a thicket and leave her where she was. She got here the day after the others arrived, with sore feet and a cold in her head. I can't spare her because she is one of the few who speak French. My own French is improving, mother dear, although the natives look blank and repeat what I say three or four times and then laugh and understand all at once.

"What are we doing? Nothing at all. Since I have been in the service I have spent more time doing nothing than in all the rest of my life, but it is the same way with the men except that they do not fret about it. They like to loaf, and I think that if this keeps up much longer I shall get that way. In the lovely hill village from which we marched here, we at least could drill and talk with the people there, but in this area we are forbidden to show ourselves by daylight and have to hide beneath the trees when a plane shows on the horizon. This really is desolate. The stone houses, when we got here, were littered with refuse and paper, the pump squeaks and is placarded "Non-potable," so we have to lug water two miles. The fields have been trampled and the crops are overgrown with weeds

and mustard. I think nothing was planted in the spring and what grain there is came up of its own accord. Still, I do not want you to think I am in danger. I have never seen a place where I felt less likely to be molested. The tracks lead east and west, but nothing ever appears on them. The roads are used by stray carts, always destined for some farmhouse in the hills. The telegraph at the station does not work and, while some one has forced the door of the waiting room and men stroll in there at will, there is no agent in the office and rows of unused tickets hang upon the wall and fade in the sun. There is a war cemetery of wooden crosses where a garden used to be, but most of the graves are unmarked and nobody ever goes near them.

"The only other officer in town is Lieutenant Nichols, of whom I have written you before. He is as kind and as gloomy as ever, and seems to have more trouble than I in getting orders which are effective. But it is the same old story. I am sure he is becoming fond of me.

"Why is it, mother, that invariably when a man shows some understanding of our aims or ambitions or even disappointments that his feeling turns like sour cream into a desire to paw all over us? Lieutenant Nichols has been very considerate about saying what is on his mind, and I suspect that he realizes he is going through some queer gym-



nastics like a sad old crane dancing and pirouetting around its mate in the spring time, but I feel his eyes upon me and I know now that what I took for an interest in my ideas has become an inexplicable longing for my body. Still, it is partly due to him that I have gotten so far and I am grateful to him for that. He really is not a bad sort. . . .”

There was a break in the text, which was continued in another envelope and must have been written on another day, since the mood was much more intense.

“I have taken a desperate step which I cannot explain to you, mother. There is nothing I would not do to carry out my purpose. I have tried to be straightforward, to play the game as it should be played, according to military rules. That has gotten me nowhere, and since they always expect some sort of subterfuge, I shall employ all the trickery of which I am capable.

“Sometimes I am far more honest with myself than usual, and to-day, after reading what I wrote about Lieutenant Nichols, I must add that I deliberately flirted with him, that I let my hair brush his cheek as we leaned over a map and held my shoulder against his when we stood in the yard together, at sundown. I wanted him to help me, I wanted to paralyze his will so that he could be of use, and now that I have succeeded, I should not

blame him. I will do the same with every man who stands in my way, although I should think any one of them could see how far my thoughts are from them. I have ranted so much against the girl who uses sex appeal in business that it seems odd that I should resort to the same thing in war, but I am beginning to understand many things much better than I did and I shall let no small scruples obscure my purpose. I want to settle one thing, once for all. Am I, as a woman, capable of making war? Am I as strong as a man? Have I more or less courage or endurance or sentimentality?

"Whenever I think of this, my mind goes back to you, whom I admire above any person living on this earth. Instead of saving France, I am vindicating you. I must profit by what you have suffered and overcome.

"Terrible things rush through my mind. One night at the port, in a camp just outside the city, I saw some troops having bayonet drill, with a marine sergeant cursing at them and egging them on. There was a stuffed dummy, hanging from a cross-bar, and he showed them how to slash at its throat, to kill with the point of the bayonet, or to slash and sideswipe the softer parts. 'Rip out their guts,' he expressed it.

"In watching him, I got sick at my stomach and I left the place trembling, not because of the

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language but the spirit of the thing. And it came over me that this was war, that if I thought I was strong enough to be a soldier I should have to rip out guts, and I was dismayed at the loathing I felt. All day I could think of nothing else, and that night, by moonlight, I slipped out of the barracks and went out to the drill field, all alone, with a rifle and a bayonet I had borrowed without asking for it. I don't know what got into me, but I could not do otherwise.

"I walked up to that thing half sliced to pieces and began to talk to it, as if it were alive, and to hate it as the sergeant had done. And although the back of my head prickled with faintness, I raised the bayonet slowly to touch the dummy's throat. It moved. Then suddenly I began to cry and to lose my head. I slashed and slashed the thing, biting my tongue until I could taste the blood in my throat, sobbing, cursing, until the dummy fell down to the field and lay there, and even then I stabbed through it into the ground and kicked it with my boots.

"What happened to me I do not know, except that the last vestige of feeling against the Germans was drained out of me. Since then I have felt as kindly toward the prisoners as toward the French soldiers or the village women. If this is a weakness, it is a fundamental one. I am more anxious than

ever to see all there is to see, but I can never feel self-righteous about it.

"So far as I know, I am the only one here who ever did feel self-righteous about the war. Imagine Mary Fahey, my good Irish orderly, getting worked up about saving the world. When men talk like that, she calls it boloney, and I feel sure she is right. . . ."

As I read, Lida Wetherby sat facing me and watching intently the expressions on my face. She knew the letters by heart and could follow them, passage for passage, by the appearance of the page I was holding. As I reached into the next blue envelope, she made a little involuntary movement to stop me, but she checked it and even motioned to me to go on. The handwriting showed evidences of haste and impatience, with "t's" uncrossed and small words left out entirely.

"To-night I could open my veins to let out the thoughts pent up inside me. Is there no relief from that urge to make things clear? I feel them clearly enough, and all that results is a few awkward words which sound like the random talk of a schoolgirl.

"I spent the day in the country east of here, and it was desolate but majestically so. The fields were bare, the crows walked busily through the

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last year's stubble, and parallel to the creek, on the other side, was a long, rusty entanglement of barbed wire. I did not see a civilian nor a soldier, but above the hills almost at the horizon appeared a little row of white puffs in the air, like clouds, and then three black ones just above them. It must have been the anti-aircraft guns, but it seemed like magic to me. The huts, what few there were on the edge of the hills, were empty, and I came to the decision which should have been made a week ago. I am going to take my outfit away from here, on my own responsibility. To tell you that is no violation of my pledge of secrecy. The information would be of no use if it were placed on the desk of the chief intelligence officer in Berlin. But I want you to know that I believe to serve is to serve, and if a blunder has been made, any sensible person should correct it. There are limits within which one's own intelligence is supreme.

"Yet that is not what I mean to say. That step which seemed so vital to me yesterday, now that I have taken it, fails to impress even me. Of course one should move, if one gets somewhere too late and is forgotten. Naturally, one should go on. I don't know exactly what I want to write, although I hurried back across country and bolted my meal in order to send you some vital message. I thought of the beauty of France, of the mystery of the great

world pageant which has passed before me, the essential dignity of the human soul, my longing for you and for life itself. Bits of old landscapes tumbled through my mind, stretches on the Cape where you are now, Boston harbor, sleeping companies of Africans at Dijon, Jordan Hall with Gauthier singing, and, now as I sit down to write, one almost irrelevant phrase keeps singing in my ears. I believe I am capable of love.

"There was never less reason for my thinking of it. There is not a man I know with whom I can imagine such intimacy without amusement or disgust. An area of rotting fields and deserted cottages, with stagnant water to drink and crows in full possession of the air is not a setting to stir romantic thoughts, and still I realized to-day that somehow I am unfulfilled. I know that I can be warmer and more radiant, that I should be thrilled and awed to find that another person could send his thoughts to me and read my own. I realize now that my desire to run and ride and let the wind blow through my hair may be just a hint of what it might mean to use my body unrestrainedly. And I believe, at the same time, that you are as much bewildered about passion as I am. To me, you seem so much more of a woman than these girls around me, and yet I have the feeling that that part of life has escaped you. What is it all about? You are sixty years old, I am



half your age. Even I have reached the years when half the women in the world are so spent that they are ready to be discarded, and I am as ignorant as a child, not of facts but of feelings. Is our race more aloof, or is our training in some way at fault?

"I have read too much. I know that everything results from my desire to eat or my instinct that the race be perpetuated. I certainly did not come to France for food. What is left? Have I merely been stalking a male in the name of patriotism and emancipation?

"What if such thoughts should come to one at just the wrong moment? Is there any way of groping through the attic of a cluttered brain without colliding with broken-down furniture?

"I wish sometimes that I had been raped when I was fourteen years old!"

. . . . .

"And I never heard from her again," Lida Wetherby said, this time her eyes quite dry.

#### IV

As soon as our survey was finished, I hurried away. Bard was surprised and a trifle hurt, since I could not conceal my haste to leave the Cape. Doubtless he thought it was dull and lonely for me, because of his difficulty in hearing what I said and the fact

that our habits kept us astir at different periods of the day.

I had told Alberta's mother nothing of what I had learned from McCann, because I could only add to her perplexity, but I could not believe that the records in Washington were completely barren of information about the 213th Field Signal Battalion and its stray detachment of replacements. There must be surviving members of the outfit, I thought, and I resolved to find them.

The censorship had completely discouraged Alberta from giving her mother an account of their movements or of the nature of their training, except for details which every one in the United States at that time associated with life in military camps, but I had other facts at my disposal.

The weather turned cold the day I took the train for Boston. Chill gray clouds massed in turrets in the lower reaches of the sky and the promise of spring was obliterated. The first drops spattered against the car windows, steel sheets of rain spilled slantingly upon the bogs and the telegraph wires droned a steady complaint while the train stopped at the dripping little stations. Scrub trees and stone walls were obscured, and the stove which had cheered the car in the winter months had been dismantled, so I shivered through the hours, and it occurred to me that in France the weather had



taken such a turn in the autumn of 1918, about the time Alberta's letters had stopped and the first American army had gone into action at Saint-Mihiel. Her letters had been mailed at Ligny-en-Barrois, she had been exploring the country to the east, and had seen anti-aircraft guns. As I peered into the rain, I could seem to see her marching at the head of her detachment, soaked to the skin, pausing at the crossroads to read the signs, with desolation and uncertainty around her and the battlefields ahead. It was pathetic, it was even ridiculous, but I found myself wishing for her to have her one slim chance of action. I shared the impulse of Lieutenant Nichols, who, forgetting his own affairs, had helped her on her way.

That same night, I took the express for Washington, where I knew some of the newspapermen covering the White House, and the next day I began a long and tiresome search through dingy corridors, with officials polite enough to wish me well, because of a letter one of my acquaintances had had addressed to me by the President's secretary. Every one was skeptical about my finding what I wanted. I merely asked to look over the records of the 213th Field Signal Battalion, for the purpose of writing a small historical work, and no one seemed at all disposed to obstruct me. I was welcome to anything I could find.

My first difficulty was that I did not know to which division the 213th Field Signal Battalion had been attached. Wherever I went, that was the first question asked me and finally one of the clerks, somewhat annoyed because I did not appear to be easily discouraged, found me a list of all the divisions which had served with the First Army. Each division had a signal battalion and none of them was numbered two hundred and thirteen. I was puzzled and I think she was secretly glad for she went over to her table near the window and sorted a wire basket full of service records, tossing small sheaves of them secured in the middle by rubber bands into another basket at her left, watching me from the corner of her eye.

I had not spent more than one day in that grim stone building, where my feet echoed on marble floors and the light sifted through rain-covered window panes set deep in granite sills, without realizing how little I knew about the organization of armies. There were branches of the service of which I had never heard, and although I had been listening to stories about the signal corps for the better part of one winter, I had to admit, upon reflection, that I was not sure just how it functioned. No one in the building could enlighten me. The clerks, mostly girls just out of school, were scattered through rooms which had been subdivided



by partitions of matched boards into compartments filled with vertical files and rows of drawers tagged with enigmatic labels. Here and there an army officer or a field clerk would be seated alone in a quiet office and, warned by my approaching footsteps, would be pretending to read a letter or signing some document by the time I reached his doorway. Usually he was pleased to have some one to talk with, once he grasped that my errand was not likely to cause him any trouble. One of these men, however, gave me a suggestion I thought worth while to follow up.

"Why don't you ask the Chief Signal Officer?" he said.

It was just before five o'clock, so I could do nothing until the next morning at ten. Being short of money I had taken a room in a cheap hotel and went from one restaurant to another for my meals, until indigestion made me uneasy and restless during the long evenings. The short span of office hours, broken by a lunch which I dreaded, seemed to pass each day before I could get anything accomplished, and I spent the rest of the twenty-four hours, except for a little sleep, pushing against the blank wall of folders and index cards and identification numbers which hedged me in and beyond which might be news of Alberta Snyder and of John McCann.

The Chief Signal Officer was many blocks from the gray stone building through which I had been wandering, but when finally I was ushered into his office, thanks again to my letter from the President's secretary, he was courteous and very obliging. The light was much brighter than in the corridors to which I had become accustomed, so I could not help noticing when I mentioned the 213th Field Battalion that he had never heard of it or it had passed completely from his mind. Since it had become so important to me, I was almost indignant.

I mentioned to him that it had been organized at Camp Devens.

"Oh, it must have been a draft outfit," he said.

"No, it was the only enlisted outfit in camp," I replied, unable to refrain from informing him about what I had hoped he would be able to instruct me.

"That's queer," he said. But he sent me to another office in which were records of the cantonments in America and advised me, since I knew where the unit was organized, to start at the very beginning and trace it through. When I told him about my difficulty with the division numbers, he said that the 213th might have been corps or army troops, so my visit gave me fresh hope.

At one o'clock I was sitting on the steps of the



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building to which he had referred me, waiting for the personnel to get seated within. I told the secretary of one of the executives that I had been sent there by the Chief Signal Officer and was received at once. The alert and very efficient young man pressed a button.

"Bring me the records of the 213th Field Signal Battalion, if you please, Miss Wentworth," he said, and asked me to take a chair. Nothing could have astonished me more. My throat was suddenly dry and I could hear my heart pounding against my ribs as Miss Wentworth's heels clicked down the hallway. The man in whose office I sat tried to keep up an amiable conversation, but I missed the import of everything he said and made such rambling replies that he must have thought me slightly crazy. I heard the heels approach and then Miss Wentworth entered empty-handed. I should have known, I told myself. It looked too easy.

"Which records did you want, sir? There are several drawers full of them."

"Perhaps you would like to look at them where they are, sir," he said, and I followed Miss Wentworth, as suddenly revived as I had been depressed. She opened a metal drawer with roller bearings and pointed to a long row of neatly marked folders. Near by were cases of morning reports, rosters and forms upon which clothing and equipment had

been issued. But the file which impressed me most and upon which Miss Wentworth looked with considerable pride was filled with little square cases, about six inches wide, in which were stiff cards ruled into columns above which were sticking innumerable little celluloid index tabs in red, green, yellow, and a dozen other tints and hues. It was arranged alphabetically, and my nervous fingers sought the M and then the Mc.

"McCann, John Luke (2,719,886) pvt. 1cl"

This was neatly typed across the top, and at the left hand side began columns of occupations and accomplishments, none of which was checked. Near the lower right hand corner, however, under the word "Remarks" was written "Street car conductor." Miss Wentworth smiled pleasantly at my apparent glee.

"It's ingenious, isn't it?" she said.

At five o'clock she came again.

"I'm sorry, but we have to close," she said. "If you like you may come again in the morning."

All afternoon I had scanned the contents of one folder after another, finding nests of typewritten words, figures and army hieroglyphics which stood for the transfer of Captain Casey, the arrival of Nichols, Sanford, 2nd Lieutenant, U.S.V.C., events of which I had been aware but which seemed to take on added significance as I was able to trace

them, one by one. My research had concluded with a pencil notation at the end of one of the rosters which must have been prepared just before the outfit had sailed.

"Embarked, 5, 2, '18 (XA 32)."

I could make out that "5, 2, '18" meant May 2, which checked with all McCann had told me, but the "XA 32" stumped me. I appealed to Miss Wentworth. In spite of the fact that the clock hands had moved to five minutes past five, she deferred her departure long enough to consult a long gray book in her chief's bookcase. She nodded and smiled.

"XA 32 means *Agamemnon*," she said.

"By George, that's right," I said, and left in great excitement.

V

MORE than half the night I tried to wring from my memory the number of the casual company which Alberta Snyder had organized and commanded. McCann had mentioned it once or twice, but nothing I could do would bring the figures into my mind again. Her mother had called it "a crowd of telephone girls." So I went to sleep exhausted and dreamed all night of confused incidents in which figures in khaki drifted in and out of stone corridors and barbed-wire entanglements, with the face

of some flaxen-haired girl I had not seen since my school days somehow dominating the scene.

In the morning I found a roster of Casual Company No. 356 (telephone) which had been trained at some former girls' camp in New Hampshire. Snyder, Alberta, 1st lieutenant, Signal Corps, U.S.A., headed the list and on it I found the names of Florence Mason, Juanita Ray and Mary Eileen Fahey. There was a record that the camp had been broken up in April, 1918, but nothing which would give a hint about its transfer to the A.E.F. I had recognized Alberta's handwriting on the signatures to the rosters.

"The service records are on file in the archives of the signal corps, or at least they should be," Miss Wentworth said. Already she had established for me, by looking through files of an Army weekly, that former Brigadier-General Emil Snyder, having reverted to his pre-war status of major, was in El Paso.

The colonel who had been detailed to bring the archives up to date was in a bad humor when I was introduced to him, but he overcame his temper and explained his troubles to me. All available clerks, either military or civilian, had been pressed into service in the various bureaux which had been set up to find employment for the soldiers who had returned. Thousands of men were out of work, all

over the country. Some states had tried to make provision for them, others had done nothing. The press was complaining, the veterans were becoming embittered.

"I just want to show you something," he said, unwilling to let a sympathetic listener escape. And he led me out of doors and into a sort of freight yard where several spur tracks ended abruptly in bumpers built of beams. The sliding doors of a corrugated steel warehouse were open and inside were mounds of field desks with rusty padlocks, piano boxes with papers protruding through the cracks, lockers with the doors nailed down, and bales of documents imperfectly enclosed in cardboard cartons, stained by the weather and dented by rough handling.

"That's a batch of stuff that got in to-day from Camp Meade," he said. "I've got four more warehouses full from the A.E.F. that isn't touched and isn't likely to be in our lifetime. They had more men with typewriters during the war than ever caught sight of the trenches, and all their mistakes are piled up here." He swept the freight yard with his hand.

"And all I have to do is to answer any questions that may be asked," he added. "Do you know this woman's number?"

"It's 2,414,688," I said.

“Well, maybe you have a chance to locate her, then.”

Before the week was out, I had become a familiar figure in the archives department and the adjoining freight yard. The clerks ceased paying attention to me, the colonel spent the hours trying to frame conciliatory letters to the dozens of men or women who appealed to him each day for news of missing soldiers. My results, although meager, never brought me quite to a standstill.

Some of the reports had been neatly and carefully prepared, others were illegible and inaccurate. There were gaps in the files of orders from army and corps headquarters, almost nothing regarding transportation and I quickly realized that the corps and division commanders had been quite as bewildered about the distribution of replacements as I was. I found evidences in the rosters of Saint Nazaire and Is-sur-Tille that Alberta's company had passed through, but after the point at which she had dropped the designation (f) I could find nothing at all. I looked through every corridor, systematically at first and then at random, hoping to find records from Fays-Billot. Often I would stand in the door of the warehouses, looking at the rusted field desks and bales of papers, trying to force myself to divine which one of the battered containers held the clues I must have. The colonel watched me

sardonically, pleased to have been able to show one of the many persons who had demanded information the difficulties under which he was laboring.

How odd, I reflected, are the relics a person leaves along his trail. Alberta's mother had shown me a few snapshots of Alberta in a white dress as she was graduated from the Orleans High School, a diploma from the Conservatory, concert programs, dance cards, a picture of her fishing, clad in riding breeches, her birth certificate, a cup she had won in a track meet. And now there were a few typewritten phrases, kept in perpetual darkness within metal drawers showing that she had been issued a pair of gloves, or had drawn rations for forty men at some obscure commissary.

When first I told Colonel Cole that I was trying to trace a woman who had served in the signal corps, I had been pleased that he showed no surprise. After I became better acquainted with him I realized he would have felt no amazement if I had asked him about a troop of llamas. He was willing to believe that anything might have happened in the A.E.F.

My trouble in identifying the 213th battalion with a division was solved when I found, almost accidentally, in the General Orders, 5th Corps, 1st Army, a citation which commended the outfit for "having served as corps troops under fire and in

gassed areas with twelve combat divisions in the Saint-Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne offensives." It was signed by General Summerall. Soon afterwards, I located the service records of Lieutenant Nichols and of McCann. The former had been discharged with what remained of the battalion in Camp Devens in April 1919, the latter, after passing through numerous casual companies, had been discharged in France. But nowhere could I find the service record of Alberta Snyder, Florence Mason, Juanita Ray or Mary Fahey. Three weeks in Washington had enabled me to discover in a more round-about way things I already knew, but the 5th Corps citation and the notation of the Meuse-Argonne offensive upon Lieutenant Nichols' service record and also upon McCann's, although the latter was transferred to a base hospital at Souilly on October 2, 1918, led me to conclude that the main battalion, after having left Laferté for Châtillon and Châtillon for Ligny, had been sent into the lines around Saint-Mihiel before Lieutenant Nichols and his mixed detachment had joined Major McGregor, but that the adjutant had been with the others during the Meuse-Argonne operations which began two weeks after Saint-Mihiel was taken. It was easy for me to recall that the Argonne drive had commenced at eleven o'clock in the evening of September 25. Seven days later, McCann had entered the hospital

at Souilly. Then I remembered in Alberta Snyder's last letter, which she had written presumably from Ligny, "I am going to take my outfit away from here, on my own responsibility . . ." and later, "Of course one should move if one gets somewhere too late and is forgotten. Naturally one should go on. . . ."

A study of the records I had already found did not enable me to decide between two hypotheses. Did Alberta, tired of waiting for the less decisive Nichols to take the responsibility, go out in search of the 213th Field Signal Battalion with her forty girls and get lost in the confusion of army movements between Ligny and Saint-Mihiel, only to be sent back into a safer area? Or did she persuade Nichols to accompany her with his men, in search of Major McGregor? It was certain that Nichols had taken part in the Argonne offensive with the main battalion.

The name of Sergeant Henry Horn upon a roster recalled to me what McCann had said about him, and so I examined his record also. It was longer and more complicated than the others had been. He had taken part in the Saint-Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne offensives, and had been transferred to a U.S. hospital at Commercy on November 2. There was a notation that he had received one wound stripe, and had passed through Saint Aignan on his way to the States to be discharged as a casual.

This would have revealed nothing to me if I had not noticed, as I started to put the papers back into the files, a letter which had become detached from his other records and which had been written since the war, relative to an insurance payment. It contained his business address in Boston, Massachusetts. I left Washington in haste, hardly taking time to gather up the notes I had made.

When I arrived in Boston, I went at once to the street and number given, finding it was just behind the Post Office in the insurance district. The top of the basement of the building was just above the street level, so that the first-floor offices began at the height of a man's shoulder above the sidewalk. Seated at an old-fashioned roll-top desk near the windows was a stocky little man with humorous eyes and an almost bulging forehead, so much younger than the others, although his hair was thin and gray, that I knew he must be Sergeant Horn. Now that I had found him I was so perplexed as to how to approach him that I crossed to the opposite sidewalk to watch him, forgetting that it was nearly time for the offices to close. He made some remark to a man across the room, laughed and took a somewhat stained straw hat with a too-narrow brim from a hook behind him, placed it upon his head and left the room with a sheaf of letters in his hand.

As soon as he appeared upon the street I introduced myself to him. When I mentioned McCann he recognized the name and we agreed to lunch together. In the restaurant, however, Horn appeared to be distracted by the voices and confusion around him and although, after I had explained briefly my meeting with Alberta Snyder's mother, he showed no unwillingness to tell me what he knew, I sensed that he preferred to tell me in some more secluded place. As I was about to suggest this, he asked me if I could not come home with him that evening, so that we might be undisturbed. I enjoyed an afternoon of anticipation.

After taking the ferry to East Boston at six o'clock, and the narrow-gauge railroad to one of the small stations in Winthrop, Horn led me to a small, garage-like cottage within sight of the harbor and well in the rear of the larger residence it had been originally intended to serve. Inside, it was quite cozy. As I stepped through the doorway, Horn said to the girl who rose to meet him:

"Juanita, I want you to meet . . ."

And instantly I surmised that the young woman before me, whose rich dark hair was neither long nor short and whose oval face was dominated by candid dark blue eyes and curved lashes, was Juanita Ray.

PART THREE



Sergeant Horn

I

WE were camped in a little place called Villers-Cousances, in a couple of long sheds they must have used for a sort of fair grounds years before, Sergeant Horn began. There was another empty stable, so dirty we hadn't tried to clean it out, about fifty yards away, and across the road on the slope of a hill a little shack with a rusty stove and a table built into a corner. The Frogs had used it for headquarters and so I took it over and was sleeping there nights and using it for a battalion office in the daytime.

We were quite a distance behind the trenches in the Argonne area and the rain had set in, day and night. Farther back was an ammunition dump the Germans were trying to get, and when the planes flew over they dropped a bomb now and then, so we had to be careful about showing a light.

The main village, what there was left of it, was across the creek and the officers had found a dry place for their bedrolls there and left me to check up the sick men and keep the boys from lighting cigarettes out in the open after dark. We had just marched forty miles in one night, in a

pouring rain, and everybody was tired that wasn't sick. Our chauffeurs showed up from Marseilles with the trucks and motorcycles we rated and it began to look as if we might get into action, after all, but nobody knew exactly. We were short forty men who got sick at Ligny, and every week we had sent in a requisition for replacements but so far nothing had happened. The major was getting nervous for fear we would be relieved if they found a full-strength outfit to put in our places. After fourteen years of peace-time soldiering he was anxious to show what he could do.

The principal thing any of us remembered about Ville-sur-Cousances was the rats.

That's no joke, broke in Juanita, and her husband laughed.

That's how we got together, he said. I was playing poker one night in a corner of the shed, with blankets hung around to keep the light from the cracks, and about ten o'clock in the evening I heard a noise from the direction of the road and a little later the sound of feet and voices near the empty stables.

Some poor buggers are going to sleep in that barn, Mahan said.

The stable was full of rats, long as your arm, and filthy with . . . well, you know what gets piled up in a stable. But I didn't pay much attention. I

was afraid that if I showed my head, some strange shave-tail would bring a lot more men into our sheds, so I played on until after midnight and then started for my shack, in pitch dark. The mud was so thick that I didn't make much noise and the first thing I knew I ran into some one wandering around the yard and the person let out a little yell that sounded like a woman. I thought I'd gone crazy, but I risked pressing my flashlight and who was it but this girl here, so sleepy she could hardly talk or stand up, and her face spattered with mud.

I can't help it, said Juanita, half suspecting her husband was making fun of her. A rat ran right across my face. We'd been marching God knows how far that night, and hadn't had a decent sleep for four or five days and nothing hot to eat, and when they told us to lie down in that barn I held my nose and fell sound asleep. I could have slept anywhere, and still can, for that matter. But I woke up thinking I heard a lot of squealing and something ran over my cheek, with cold feet and sharp claws, and I had forgotten where I was and couldn't see my hand in front of me. I was so scared that I didn't yell. It sort of stupefied me, but I couldn't go to sleep again nor stay where I was, so I felt for the door and started walking in the mud when I ran into Henry.

Well, Sergeant Horn went on, I saw she was

too far gone to answer any questions, so I led her up to my shack and she caught one sight of the bunk and tumbled in and went so sound asleep she didn't wake up when I hauled her boots off. There was nothing for me to do but balance myself on the edge of the bunk and hope to God the major wouldn't get up too early in the morning.

I wish you could have seen the expression on her face when she sat up and rubbed her eyes and saw me, the sergeant said. She was game, though, and said she'd make an honest man of me.

I did not, said Juanita. I asked you where I was and how I got there.

It was then I found out what had happened, Sergeant Horn said. She told me Lieutenant Nichols had brought them along from Laferté, but even then I didn't tumble to the fact that they were supposed to be our replacements. Mahan had told us there were a lot of women at Laferté, but I never had supposed they would get to such a God-awful hole as Ville-sur-Cousances. I could just imagine what the major was going to say when Nichols handed him forty girl scouts for soldiers.

We weren't girl scouts, Juanita said.

At any rate, the sergeant said, I gave Juanita a half-cupful of water from my canteen to wash her face with, and while she was washing and talking to me at the same time I saw the adjutant


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coming up the hill with a woman beside him. This war's picking up, I thought. "Christ Almighty," Juanita said, "if she catches me here she'll have me shot at sunrise." So Juanita rolled under the bunk and I pulled the blanket over so that it would hang down and hide her. A minute later, Lieutenant Nichols knocked on the door. It couldn't have been more than half past six o'clock. "Come in," I said, and in stepped a tall woman with two gold bars on her shoulder with the lieutenant following. I saluted both of them, then shook hands with Nichols. He was looking sheepish, so nervous he could hardly talk straight. "Where's the major?" he asked. "He sleeps over there," I told him, and pointed to the stone house in the deserted village across the creek, "but he comes here every morning." "We'd better wait," Lieutenant Snyder said. "I'll go back and get the girls out for breakfast."

The adjutant hung around, looking tired and glum. His uniform was muddy and his hair needed cutting around the back of his neck. I could see that he was dreading to face the major. Outside, our outfit was lining up for breakfast and I heard a cheer when the girls came out of the barn and formed for a roll call. We had quit calling the roll weeks before, when we left Ligny. The adjutant heard the noise and was about to go down the hill to quiet the boys, but just before he went he dug

his hands around the back of his collar and squirmed in his shirt. "Have you got 'em too?" I asked, and I saw Juanita move under the blanket. She hates bugs. Lieutenant Nichols scratched again. "My God, sergeant, I'm lousy," he said, unable to believe it. "So am I, and everybody else around here," I said to make him feel better, but he set out on the hot foot looking for his dog-robber—that was McCann you told me about—to get a change of clothes. Juanita crawled out from under the bunk. "You don't mean to say?" she said, and began to scratch. "What did you expect when you joined the army?" I said, but then she heard the roll being called. "I hope Florence Mason has sense enough to answer for me," she said, and I began to think the girls might be soldiers after all. They had caught on to the army tricks. "You better get out of here before the major comes," I warned her.

It was just like a show, Juanita interrupted.

"They'll ship you back in the S.O.S. right after breakfast," I said. "That's all right with me," said Juanita. "I haven't had a bath for two weeks." Little did she know what was coming to her. She slipped into the breakfast line without Lieutenant Snyder's noticing her and, while the girls were eating, I saw Major McGregor crossing the creek. Lieutenant Nichols saw him coming, too, and he ducked out behind the kitchen and stayed out of

sight; but Lieutenant Snyder took a paper out of her pocket and went down the row of duckboards to meet him. When she saluted, he tipped his cap, and I started toward them, hoping to hear what he said. He was reading the order as I passed by.

(I knew the contents of the order better than did Sergeant Horn, for McCann had repeated it to me.)

. . . You will proceed at once on foot to Ligny-en-Barrois, reporting there to the Commanding Officer, 213th Field Signal Battalion. . . .

"What in hell does this mean? Are you Lieutenant Snyder?" I heard the major ask; and then he remembered he was talking to a woman and excused himself. He was a polite Scotchman and, although he could swear worse than a longshoreman if anything went wrong, he was always bashful when women were around.

"I had orders to report to you, sir," Lieutenant Snyder said. She was white and nervous, but she held her voice steady and stood up straight. Just then the major caught sight of Lieutenant Nichols, who had been ashamed to hide any longer. "What in the name of God has got into that outfit at Fays-Billot?" the major shouted, forgetting all about Miss Snyder again. "I write 'em for replace-

ments and they send me a bunch of Y.M.C.A. girls."

"Lieutenant Snyder had orders, sir, so she was obliged to move. We left Laferté at the same time."

"Orders? What in hell good are orders? Why couldn't you put a stop to it and not come trailing halfway across France with the Ladies' Auxiliary?"

At this, Lieutenant Snyder got mad. "My troops are perfectly trained and equipped for telephone work," she said, biting her lips to hold her temper.

"Troops! What do you mean troops? This is no damned opera. You don't understand there's a war going on up there." And the major pointed over beyond the village.

"I understand that very well," Lieutenant Snyder said, cold as steel. "I am prepared to go wherever you choose to send me. Besides," she continued, "I have a dozen non-coms who can take a switchboard to pieces and several more who speak and understand French." Nichols had told her we had been trained for telegraph work by mistake and she hit a sore spot of the major's there. At any rate, he saw he had offended her and tried to be courteous again.

"I don't blame you, madam," the major said.

“Call me lieutenant,” she snapped, almost automatically.

The major was stumped. “I can’t spare a truck to get you out of here,” he said. “You’ll have to stay in that stable.”

“I’ll have it cleaned at once, sir,” she said. “And you may call on us for anything that needs to be done.”

The major was so mad he couldn’t talk any longer, so he turned on his heel and left them. I started to ask Lieutenant Nichols about the morning report, glad to have it taken off my hands, and he introduced me to Lieutenant Snyder. She was really handsome, then, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining, but as we were talking I noticed that she dug down the back of her collar and squirmed a little; and Lieutenant Nichols noticed it too, and his face got red and he was so flustered that he couldn’t say anything.

It’s nothing to laugh at, Juanita said.

## II

It was not many hours before the major was caught in as tight a fix as Lieutenant Nichols had been, Sergeant Horn continued. All along he had been worried for fear the corps headquarters would send us back because we had so little equipment and were short so many men and besides had had no

telephone training. He sulked around all morning and, of course, didn't count the forty girls as being a part of the battalion at all, but he had no idea what to do with them and he couldn't get up his nerve to go to headquarters and report that a detachment of women had been sent to him by mistake. Major McGregor had spent half his life in the regular army, the Philippines, Shanghai, Mexico, and Nome, Alaska, and to see hundreds of new majors and colonels and even generals, who had stepped right out of their golf clothes to become warriors, had made him think the army was not what it used to be. All the regulars felt that way. Mahan used to say that he had been in the guard-house longer than the shave-tails from Plattsburg had been in the service.

In the middle of the afternoon Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes, corps signal officer, came rushing into Ville-sur-Cousances in a Dodge and found Major McGregor in my shack. The colonel was in a terrible hurry and hardly listened to anything the major said. He spread out a map on the table and pointed out the line of trenches the French had occupied. "We've got to get to work quick," he said. "And we've got to dig deep enough so the main line won't be shot in two! Are you all set to go?" he asked the major. "Split up your best telephone men and send them out in detachments.



You'll be spread over the whole corps area." The major didn't know what to say, but he couldn't give up the idea of going into action, so he listened to the plans and was wondering all the time how he was going to be able to carry them out short-handed.

"By the way," the colonel asked after he had turned over the map to the major, "have you any men who can understand French? The most important switchboard is here," and he pointed to a spot on the map. "The French artillery will be firing to the right of us and their observers will phone in how our shots are going. We can't have any guessing about it, and some one will have to be there twenty-four hours a day. Have you got any operators who know French?"

"I've got just the man," said the major, thinking of Trombla.

"You'll need a half dozen," the colonel said, but he passed right on to other things and the major didn't come right out and tell him Trombla was the only one who knew six words of the language. I saw the major hesitate, but he had been disappointed so many times he couldn't bring himself to risk his chances.

"What in the name of God shall we do?" he asked me as soon as Colonel Forbes had left.

I had been thinking hard, and I remembered

that Lieutenant Snyder had said she had non-coms who could take a switchboard to pieces and others who could speak French, and besides I had gotten so much attached to having Juanita around that the prospect of keeping her with us didn't seem so ridiculous as it had at first. You know how a man reasons when he's in love. So I said to the major: "Why not use these telephone girls on the French switchboard? No one will know the difference until we get started and then if everything is working well they won't throw us out."

I was half kidding at first, but I got quite serious as I went along and the whole thing seemed to make a kind of sense. I didn't realize how near the major was to blowing up, and I'll never forget what I saw when I looked up at his face. He was too mad to talk. All he could do was choke and splutter and his face got an ugly purple, but he cooled down after a while and in a half hour began to look over the map again.

"I don't suppose there'll be any danger in a dugout behind the hill there," he said. "The infantry will move on through the woods the first day. On the level, sergeant, do you think we could do it? That woman's got a lot of nerve. I can see that."

"It's that or nothing," I said. "You can pass the buck to Fays-Billot."

"Call the adjutant up here," the major said.

“I’ll let him break the news. He hasn’t got any sense of humor. And the day this war’s over, I’m going to send my commission to the President and tell him where to shove it. I’ve spent fourteen years in the signal corps just to command the world’s first coeducational battalion.”

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. And the major got sore again. “Send Mahan up here first,” he said. “He’ll probably light out for Brest and crack a couple of warships together.” I yelled for an orderly to find Mahan and a few minutes later the big ex-marine showed up at the door and saluted.

The major turned on him. “From to-day on you’re a sergeant first class,” he said. “No more monkey business. We’ve got work to do. Now to-morrow you start out of here for a place named Avocourt, with six men, and report to Colonel Forbes that you’re ready to start the ditch for the main line of communications. He’ll tell you where the take-offs ought to be. Here’s the map. I’ll give you a copy of it.”

“Yes, sir,” said Mahan, still at attention.

“And you better sew some chevrons on,” the major said. “You’ll be far enough from a saloon so I won’t have to bust you before the week is out.”

Before Lieutenant Nichols came in, the major said to me: “You’ve done a good job on all this paper work, sergeant, so I’m going to give you a

little rest. You can take a truck with all these ladies who know French and switchboards, and a few of our boys to protect 'em, and run that station at Verrières Farms, to direct artillery fire."

I thought then that the major was joking, but I soon realized he had got to the point where anything seemed better than going back to some replacement camp and having the outfit split up. I decided to take Wallace because he was so polite and Horseshoer Smythe because he was too bashful to do any harm and of course I had to have Danny Trombla. I didn't know the names of any of the girls, so I hunted up their top sergeant, Florence Mason, and she danced all around the stable when I told her what was up. "We'll have room for four," I told her. "The others will have to stay here, until the whole battalion moves up." Just then Lieutenant Snyder came in and Florence became quite military.

"The major has directed me to tell the lieutenant," she began, but always with a sparkle in her eyes, "that four of us speaking French are to be ready to start out for the front this afternoon."

It was the first time Lieutenant Snyder had been able to believe she was not going to be chased out of the war zone and for the only time, except once much later, I saw tears in her eyes. She had been under such a strain and had driven herself so

hard to keep from breaking down that I thought for a moment she was going to fall right over in the mud, but she caught herself and was very business-like.

"Detail Corporal Ray and Private Fahey," she said. "You and I will go, as well."

I went over to find Wallace and Smythe and sent a man after Trombla, who had gone with B company to the delousing station which had been rigged up over the creek.

When I came back, I saw the adjutant and Lieutenant Snyder standing in the doorway. "I'm sorry," I heard her say to him, and I could see he was sick with disappointment. I felt a little guilty, myself, leaving him to make out morning reports in the shack on the hill while I rode off with the woman any one could see he was in love with. He had taken his medicine all the way through, stayed with the men in quarantine when they had scarlet fever in Camp Devens, waited for weeks at Laferté while the others were moving, and now at the last minute he was more out of luck than ever. The major knew he was giving him a raw deal, but he couldn't spare both of us and I had gotten the break by being with him at just the right time. The truck drove up to headquarters in the middle of the afternoon and after piling everything in that we needed, and a box of grub to last three or four

days, Florence Mason, Juanita and Big Mary climbed over the running board with Trombla, Wallace and Smythe, while Lieutenant Snyder sat up on the front seat with me beside the chauffeur. The major didn't come down to see us off, and neither did the adjutant, and the boys that gathered around didn't dare to kid us because of Lieutenant Snyder sitting there. The chauffeur released the hand brake and stepped on the gas and we jolted across the creek headed north, and that's the last we ever saw of Ville-sur-Cousances.

### III

THAT was the first trip since we landed in Laferté when we didn't have to walk, Juanita said. While her husband had been talking, she had listened dreamily, her long curved lashes lying on her cheek, sometimes, then opening wide. Her lips were full and almost plaintive and her expression reflected whatever mood prevailed in the sergeant's story. Walking still seemed horrible to her—the memory of the long grilling hike to Ligny, during which she had dropped out and lain by the roadside, then limped along in fear of having lost the others, and the still more arduous march along camouflaged roads at night in pursuit of the 213th signal battalion, which had pulled out from the woods around Saint-Mihiel before Lieutenant Nichols and Alberta



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had been able to catch up with it. From the way in which she curled up in a chair like a contented animal she conveyed her appreciation of not having to exert herself again. She looked healthy enough, but luxuriously indolent. Even the dinner she had served, although it was excellent, I could see had been prepared with a minimum of effort.

We hadn't been on the road an hour, Sergeant Horn continued, without its seeming that Ville-sur-Cousances was back as far as Brest. It was a gray September afternoon, must have been about the twentieth, and the sky was overcast and chill. From the dampness of the air, I thought it might start raining again. There were low clouds around the horizon and higher clouds moved slowly across the middle of the sky, dovetailed solidly together. Before twilight, we were going on steadily across a bleak flat, with level fields around which were brown and overgrown with weeds and mustard. On the front seat the engine kept us warm, but the others were cold, from the long ride and cramped positions the load squeezed them into; so we stopped now and then to let them unkink their legs.

Lieutenant Snyder looked ahead, eagerly, and when there was nothing out of the ordinary to see, turned sidewise again to watch the fields and walls and scrubby orchards, stripped even of leaves. We passed a barbed-wire entanglement, rusty and in a

state of collapse, then a ditch which at first looked as if it might have been a trench. A double row of poplars lined the road, except in stretches where poles had been stuck up to hold the remnants of some cloth camouflage. I have never seen a country more quiet, and the air seemed heavy and charged with electricity or something.

At the edge of the flat the road dipped into a shallow slough and, just to the right, a stone chimney, split straight up and down to show the soot inside, stood over a heap of stones and cement. It was the first house we had seen which had been hit by a shell. In Ville-sur-Cousances one or two had been wrecked by bombs from the air, but the rest were still standing.

The sun broke through the clouds for a moment, on the level of the hilltops ahead, and turned the whole plain orange and it caught the top of the broken chimney and made it blaze like a coal. As the truck mounted the slope the fields grew dim again. The chauffeur looked at the lieutenant who was riding beside me, her shoulders thrown back, her hands clenched tightly together. She was so happy that she could hardly breathe, and her face, in that moment of sunlight, had an almost exalted look. I was afraid she was getting too much excited, but when she spoke she talked rationally enough.

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"Go ahead," I said to the chauffeur. For two hours I had not been sure we were on the right road, and there was no way of finding out. I decided to ride to the rim of the flat and then look at the map once more. To tell the truth, I didn't want Miss Snyder to get the idea I was lost, because she seemed to be depending on me to find the place we were headed for.

The wind died down and the light began to fade, so that those in the back of the truck felt warmer. We rode along at an even speed, and I couldn't see a thing in motion for miles around, although there were signs by the roadway that men had passed that way. Then we saw piles of hand grenades, shells and boxes of machine-gun ammunition standing unguarded, and one or two old boots and torn blankets lay in the ditch. Every half mile or so there were snarls of barbed wire held down with rusted spikes.

Still, nothing could have been more peaceful or lifeless—the gray sky, the fields all brown and marked with stone walls and ragged lines of bare trees. The chauffeur, although there was a straight stretch of road ahead, drove moderately because he had sensed my uncertainty. The others were in high spirits, glad to be out in the air after two nights in that filthy stable. At the far end of the flat was a wooded area, with trees not fully grown, but tar-

board shacks were hidden there and great half-cylinders of elephant iron, and I motioned the chauffeur to stop while the lieutenant and I examined a sign nailed to one of the trees. It said simply P.C., but there were one or two French helmets lying around. Wallace gathered them in for souvenirs, thinking they might be German.

The next clump of woods was thicker and was littered with more French supplies, as if some outfit had left in a hurry. The road showed wheel tracks and heavy ruts from tanks or tractors. In a few minutes we came to a road which cut right across the one we had followed and our own road ended abruptly. I didn't dare to stall any longer, so I took out the map and spread it on the seat. With the engine stopped, the air stirred from another direction and brought with it an uneasy rumbling sound which each moment seemed to die away and then was stirred up again.

"The guns," said Smythe, and sat up straight to listen. Lieutenant Snyder strained to identify the sound, and I could see her chest moving faster beneath her tight blouse. I looked at the map, but it meant nothing at all to me. There were villages marked there which did not exist and the road on which I thought we had been riding did not end in a national highway like the one we were standing on. I heard the persistent rumble to the left and

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knowing we were supposed to be headed in the general direction of the trenches told the chauffeur to turn that way. As we rode along, it got darker, and the woods on both sides blurred into a thick brown haze, with the road chalky white ahead and mounting gradually. The noise of the truck drowned out the guns, and then, all at once, beyond the hills, a little globe of blue fire hung a moment in the air, shedding light all around. As we were watching it, it died and sank down in a wavering line. I knew it must be a star shell.

The girls behind me began talking excitedly and on the horizon a faint flash leaped from side to side, like heat lightning. Then another. I was sure, then, we had heard the artillery and, as we approached another crossroads, I saw a sentry standing there. The chauffeur jammed on the brakes and as I stepped down with the map in my hand, Lieutenant Snyder moved over so the man wouldn't see her skirt.

The big raw-boned M.P. started to challenge me, then dropped his military talk and said:

"What are you birds doing on the road at this time of day? Don't you know you-all are supposed to move at night?"

"That man's from Georgia," I heard Florence Mason whisper.

"We got special orders," I said, pointing to

the blue band sewed around my arm. "That gives me the right of way."

The sentry looked at the blue band uncertainly.

"Oh, does it?" he said.

"Where's Verrières Farms?" I asked him.

"You've got me," said the M.P. "We were just sent up here to-day to relieve another outfit." He looked at my map with curiosity. "They promised to give me a map, but I haven't got it yet. . . . But you-all won't find any farms around here. The farms are all back in the S.O.S. . . . What outfit are you-all with?"

"Two hundred and thirteenth field signal battalion," I told him.

"Never heard of it," said he. "But you guys have it pretty soft. You don't have to walk."

"To hell we don't," said the chauffeur. "We only got this truck day before yesterday."

There was nothing to do but climb aboard again and as we rode on the woods grew dark and the flashes skipped back and forth across the horizon. Smythe broke open a can of salmon and dumped a helping into each mess kit, but Wallace said he'd wait. He couldn't bear the smell of salmon and was afraid of spilling the juice on his clothes. We left the woods and started to cross another plain, with scrub apple trees on one side of the



road. In the darkness, I could see piles of ammunition stacked here and there. Then another star shell shimmered ahead, much nearer, lighting up the low clouds. Of course we had to drive without headlights and the chauffeur could not avoid the holes or the ruts. Unexpectedly the road dipped down a steep hill and the dark rim of another hill beyond cut off the play of light from the guns.

"Stop here," I said to the chauffeur, and then I looked at Lieutenant Snyder. I didn't know exactly where I stood, since she was a commissioned officer and the major had told me to take charge. "I think we better wait for daylight," I said, and she nodded. We couldn't keep on driving blindly all night. None of the men behind knew we were lost.

As soon as my eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, I saw the ruins of a stone house at the left and piles of shells covered with tarpaulin or burlap, half hidden under dead branches of trees. We were on the crest of a steep ravine. The others sat on the truck, waiting for us to make up our minds.

"We'll stay here to-night," Lieutenant Snyder said. "And we'd better have something hot to eat, sergeant."

Stiffly they all climbed down from the truck and stood around, uncertain as to what to do. Then

Smythe started hauling off the boxes containing food and Big Mary pitched in to help him. Trombla lighted a cigarette but the lieutenant made him put it out and told him to start a fire.

In the ruins of the farm building I found a rusted iron stove with a tin shield over the top of the stovepipe. It was propped in a corner where the fragments of two walls remained standing. Smythe came up with an armful of sticks and a dead pine branch he had gathered from the camouflage on the ammunition stacks. At once he kneeled in front of the stove, poking out the ashes. By the time the fire was going, Wallace had measured out coffee and filled a can with water from his canteen.

"Don't use the water from that well," Lieutenant Snyder said. "There's a French placard on it saying it is poison." She was worried because of the sparks from the fire and the fact that both Smythe and Wallace were smoking, but this time she did not stop them. I saw what was on her mind and told her there was no danger from airplanes on such a cloudy night. I wasn't quite sure myself. I began to realize I wasn't sure of anything. When the major had started me out with a map, I thought I would be able to follow it. The truck stood by the roadside, just as we had left it.

Soon the coffee boiled, and Wallace poured some in each of the mess cups. It was bitter and

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hot and while it warmed us it dulled our appetites. As we sat on the stones, listening to the wind in the woods and the fitful grumbling of the guns, I heard a new sound coming across the ravine. It sounded as if men were hammering on tin pans and empty shell cases. At the same time I remembered having been told that the signal for gas was given that way. Smythe and the chauffeur looked sheepishly at me and at one another, each one ashamed to make the first move, but all of a sudden Lieutenant Snyder realized what it meant. Two star shells went up quickly over a nest of bare tree tops.

"Put on your masks," she said. The chauffeur grumbled. "Put them on, I tell you," she repeated. Smythe's elbows jerked furiously as he adjusted the gas mask and peered like a huge beetle. Florence Mason helped Big Mary get her mask unstrapped, then put her own on. Wallace was helping Juanita. Almost at the same moment, Lieutenant Snyder and I found we had left our masks in the rig and started to run, then slowed down so we would not have to breathe so deeply. I looked under the seat of the truck and put my hand right on my mask and the alarm continued. Lieutenant Snyder grew almost hysterical, throwing articles right and left from the truck and trying to control her breathing. But she could not find it and her flashlight would not work. As I stood watching her, she gave up and

sat limply on the seat, her face white and set. I had not put on my own mask, so I forced it into her hands. She turned on me furiously.

"Put on your mask," she said. "None of that." And I stood there like a fool. I knew she wouldn't take it, but still I could not force myself to put it on and leave her without one.

"Put on your mask," she repeated, and reached for her automatic. This time I got mad and threw the mask down in the mud. She was trembling with anger and chagrin at having herself disobeyed the order to keep her mask with her, but she had had it only one day and had not gotten accustomed to it. While we stood facing each other, the horns and sirens blew the safety signal. There was no smell in the air except the odor of damp woods, the mold of ruins and the oil and gasoline in the truck. Everything ahead was dark again.

Lieutenant Snyder breathed deeply, ten times. "I believe there is no danger," she said . . . and then: "Excuse my temper, sergeant. You meant well, but you must get over your chivalrous habits."

We shook hands and went to tell the others to take off their masks and get ready for the night.

#### IV

AFTER the scare about gas, we had to have a guard, so the lieutenant told the rest of us to go to sleep,



that she would watch the first part of the night. She asked me to detail some one to relieve her at midnight. It seemed a dirty trick to let her stay awake, but after the run-in we had just had I didn't want to question her orders in front of the others, so I told Trombla and the other men to spread their blankets beside the broken walls and the girls found room to stretch out on the truck. We had two blankets apiece, so Smythe and the chauffeur paired up, and so did Wallace and Trombla, putting one shelter half on the ground to keep out the moisture and covering themselves with the other. I rigged up a bed alone.

I was dead-tired, with a dull headache, and my muscles were stiff from sitting on the seat of the truck all afternoon jolting over rough roads, so I went to sleep right away, although I couldn't get Lieutenant Snyder out of my mind, and the last thing I heard was her footsteps on the road, walking back and forth. She ought to have been as tired as I was, and she had been shivering with excitement all afternoon, but she was set on standing guard and I could do nothing to stop her. Smythe began to snore, and soon I dozed off, but I must have slept less soundly than the others for I woke sitting up with my ears ringing and the end of some bad dream all scrambled up in my mind with what had happened the evening before. Before I could move

there was a terrific crash in the woods to our right and echoes all through the hills. The moon was out, just faintly, and thin clouds were rushing on so swiftly that it seemed as if the earth was turning beneath me as I looked up at the sky. Some of the others moved, but they went right to sleep again and after the single explosion all was still.

I began to realize I was cold, and the side I had been lying on was half-paralyzed, so I pulled on my trousers and boots and sat on the shelter-half to wrap my leggings. My watch said eleven o'clock, but I didn't feel like sleeping any more, and I thought I might as well relieve Lieutenant Snyder. I found her standing in the road, looking up at the clouds, and by listening hard I could hear the faint buzz of a motor which must have belonged to an airplane.

"Are the others awake?" she whispered. None of the girls were stirring on the truck. "They need rest," she added. "Did you hear the bombs?" I nodded.

"There's something queer going on over there," she said, always in a low voice. "I think we should find out what it is, sergeant." She led me down the road a short distance, in the direction from which we had come. The guns were low and indistinct behind us, almost like surf, but we turned at right angles on a smaller pathway through the



woods and soon I heard another steady rumble from the darkness then ahead of us.

"Halt!"

Both of us stopped stock-still, although the command was not for us, but had been shouted farther on in the woods. There was a scuffling of feet and a faint murmur of voices. We paused there to listen. Then with an awful clatter a tractor moved unseen through the darkness, grinding its gears and bumping over the stones. At the same time, the motors of invisible trucks snuffled and snorted.

Slowly we went on, keeping in the shadow, until at a crossroads we could see dimly a steady stream of traffic flowing on in the thin light of the moon, trucks and wagons, infantry, tanks, and cannon with their snouts turned upward at ungainly angles.

"Fall in!"

From the roadside, men we had not seen struggled wearily to their feet and slung their packs. Another command was given, and they marched forward raggedly, the last to rise falling in at the rear. The woods were sparse, but we were able to move right up to the roadside without being seen and for a long time we stood in the shadow of a large tree to watch the strange procession. It was impossible even then to see clearly and the mingled

noises of tramping feet, camions and horses' hooves made it hard to identify the objects which passed before us.

There was another drone in the air above us and a report like the sharpest crackling of thunder brought us up on our tiptoes. Up and down the line a command was shouted and the traffic on the road stopped short, like freight cars bumping together. Another explosion sounded, farther away, and the angry drone died away in the distance. Lieutenant Snyder's face was as joyous as that of a child. I knew what she was thinking, for the same thing had come into my mind. We were actually under fire, at last. And our seemingly futile ride through a deserted countryside had brought us where troops and guns and supplies were converging weirdly every night and the woods and thickets were being surcharged with shells for the guns and shelters for men and horses.

It was like that every night, and had been like that for many nights before. Regiment after regiment piled into the woods around us, truckloads of corned beef and bread, ambulances loaded with stretchers, tanks, machine guns, French 75s, rumbled over the roads at night, but none of them turned down the pathway which led to the ruins of the farmhouse in which we camped that night.

The next morning, after the lieutenant had

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had four hours' sleep in my blankets, we went down into the ravine and found an empty trench around the edge of the hillside. It was fairly dry and reinforced with branches, with a footboard made of twigs at the bottom and three or four dugouts half full of rubbish the French had left behind. While the others were cleaning them out, I cut through the woods to see if I could find some other outfit and get some idea where we were and how to get to Verrières Farms. A mile away, I found a battery of 155s in command of an artillery captain, and after checking up with his map learned that we had gotten to Verrières Farms without knowing it. The ruins in which we had slept were the farms. Lieutenant Snyder was happier than ever. It was there we were supposed to set up the switchboard.

I don't know how she kept up the pace she set for the next two or three days. I got the feeling from watching her that never in her life before had she done exactly what she wanted to do. Smythe and the other boys did the heavy lifting, but when it came to rigging up all the red, green and yellow wires and making the dozens of connections, the lieutenant and the Mason girl knew exactly what they were about. The chauffeur had taken the truck back to battalion headquarters and all the stuff we had unloaded was hidden in the dugouts. The work we were doing was in a dugout, too, so most

of the time the ruined farm on the hill and the scraggly woods ahead appeared to be quite deserted. Once a French non-com came over to check up the ammunition, and one or two regiments of infantry marched into the woods on the pathway which continued over the hill. All day, there would be no movement in sight, and then as soon as it began to get dark, steady streams of trucks and men, with motorcycles darting in and out, would begin to pour over the roads all around and, the next day, another woods would be full of men in American uniforms.

The air was charged with excitement and Florence Mason felt it even more than the lieutenant. Instead of going about her work languidly and looking sad when she stopped for a moment, her eyes shone and her cheeks were flushed. She had large gray eyes, almost round, and sandy hair with bangs in front. On the hikes or during the setting-up exercises she had always been able to hold her own with the strongest women, like Mary Fahey, but she never developed any muscle, and God knows where her strength all came from. Smythe had got used to having the girls around, although he tipped his cap now and then when he ran across them suddenly in a trench. Wallace stood by, with his elbow on a beam, chatting steadily as they worked and picking up the bits of insulation which fell on

the floor. It was he who really saved the situation, although he was no good for work. He was pleasant in any kind of weather and treated the women and men just alike, but Mary Fahey liked to tease him and would come up behind him suddenly and dig her fingers in his ribs to watch him jump and scream. Still, he was too good-natured to get sore. Trombla and Florence Mason were the best of friends, for neither of them took anything on earth seriously. I think it worried the lieutenant a little to see them together so much, but she never said anything.

It seemed as if we had been there a long time when the first three days were over, and since the switchboard was all ready to be connected, I began to wonder what was coming next. But on the morning of the fourth day, I heard some one chopping in the woods not far away, and when I went over to see what was going on I saw Mahan, with climbers on, hammering an insulator to the trunk of a tree. He had run a line over from Avocourt. At noon, he and his gang came into our dugout to eat and Mahan would hardly say a word, because the women were there, but soon after the meal he took a look at the switchboard and, as soon as his wires were connected, Florence Mason hooked the receiver over her ear and called back to corps headquarters. We were in touch with the whole Ameri-

can army, as far back as Brest. Mahan had seen so many girls working telephones back home that it didn't seem too strange to him, so he grunted and sat down, saying the major was due in the afternoon.

It was funny to watch Lieutenant Snyder as it came time for the major to arrive. She was proud of her work, and still afraid of being sent back to some safer place, and I could see she was trying to act unconcerned and efficient. The major didn't know what to say. He tested out the switchboard, asked Mahan a few questions, and then he took me aside and gave me a code list of names, all beginning with the letter "L."

"These lists are numbered, sergeant," he said. "Don't let it get out of your hands." All the headquarters of the divisions and corps of the army were on it.

"The drive starts to-morrow night, at eleven o'clock," he said. "The artillery will fire until daylight, and the infantry will start out from Avo-court and Malancourt, just the other side of these woods ahead. C Company will follow them up with a ditch for the corps communication as fast as it can be dug. Mahan has brought it up to the first-line trenches already. Now, tell me, sergeant, on the level. Can these girls stand the racket? We've got to have telephones. All the observers will report

through this station. Trombla can stay on as long as he can keep awake, but he can't do it all."

"They rigged up the switchboard," I said. "None of the rest of us could have done it."

"Well, I'll leave it to you," he said. "If we fall down, it'll be the end of me."

As soon as he left, I asked Alberta to walk down the trench a way with me and told her the hour was set for eleven o'clock the next night and what the major had said. She threw her head back and stretched her arms straight into the air.

"We'll show them," she said. "Don't you worry."

That night, an outfit of engineers camped under the trees a hundred yards away from our trench and, while we were sitting around the dug-out talking with Mahan and his crew, a whole crowd of men started to sing. I knew the song and looked down at my feet, but I wish you could have seen Mahan. He got red from his collar to the roots of his hair, when the words became plainer and plainer.

*"Where are you going to sleep to-night?
Said Bolicky Bill the sailor."*

I saw Florence Mason stuffing her handkerchief in her mouth to keep from laughing, but

Juanita here couldn't hold in. She let out a roar, and Smythe began to choke, but I was afraid to move, not knowing how Lieutenant Snyder would take it. You know the song, about Bolicky Bill and the fair young maiden. There aren't any words left out of it. The verses went on, one after another.

*"When shall we two meet again, sir?
Asked the fair young maiden.
Never no more, you bloody old whore,
Said Bolicky Bill the sailor."*

Mahan couldn't stand it any longer.

"I'll go and stop 'em," he said.

"Stay where you are, sergeant," said Lieutenant Snyder, laughing at last. "I think it's very interesting. It illustrates very well the old attitude of man towards woman."

"I'll say it does," said Mary Fahey.

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WHILE the sergeant stopped to light a cigarette, Juanita took up the story, leaning forward in the chair and holding her cheeks between the palms of her hands.

It was the next morning, she said, that Miss Snyder got us all together when the men were busy somewhere else and told us the drive was going to

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start that night. We were sitting around the dug-out, with a candle burning on a wooden box and our blankets spread out on the boards. In those days we stayed underground so much that I began to feel like a mole and to blink when I got out in the daylight. She was afraid some one would see us and make trouble, so she always found some excuse to keep us out of sight. Up to that time, I had thought of the whole business as just a kind of lark—you know what I mean, not serious—but as she spoke and I felt Florence trembling on the board beside me I began to get scared.

I knew the lieutenant had something on her mind besides the drive, and at last she pulled out a little cardboard box and looked at Mary Fahey.

"You've seen this before," she said, "and now I can explain why I was so anxious for you not to touch it. These pills are prussic acid, the quickest and most deadly poison I could find.

"To-night, at eleven o'clock, the drive is going to start. All these guns you have seen are going to be fired, at the same moment. You have heard tales about the enemy. Believe them or not. We may win. We may lose.

"If we are bombed or gassed or even killed, we are neither better nor worse off than these men who take the same chance. If we are captured, it's another story. Every time I have tried to advance

this detachment, that fact has been thrown in my face. That single possibility stands between women and their free enjoyment of life in peace or in war. I refuse to let it stand in my way forever. But you each have a right to do as you please in that respect. I am going to give each of you one of these pills and leave it up to you, if the moment comes when you think you should use it.

"Now is your last chance to go back, if you want to. For my own part, I shall stay. I know it is my fault that you are here."

She paused.

"I'll stick," I said, almost ashamed of being theatrical.

"Hold out your hands," she said, and she gave to each of us one pill, carefully wrapped in tissue paper, and told us to keep them always in the pockets of our blouses.

I didn't know what to do with the thing, because it worried me to have it right there where I could feel it all the time and I didn't have the slightest idea of using it, not if they put me in the Kaiser's own harem, but I didn't dare to throw it away for fear she might ask for it at inspection. So what could I do? I stuck it in my pocket, and the others did the same.

"That's all right for you blasted Protestants," Mary Fahey said as soon as the lieutenant went out,

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"but where do I get off? God can't blame me if the Germans gang me, but I'll never get away with suicide. I'll give my little dose to Wallace." But she put the pill in her blouse pocket, too, to humor the lieutenant. Big Mary would have knocked anybody's block off who said a word against Miss Snyder. It was Florence I was worried about. Once or twice, when she was tight, she had talked about killing herself, and later in the afternoon I found her sitting at the switchboard with the pill in her hand, looking at it.

"And to think," she said to me, "that all I would have to do would be to swallow this and it would be all over."

"Oh, lay off," I said. I couldn't stand it when she began to tell me of her troubles, and she always did when she got a drink or two. There was some man, an actor, whom she loved at college, and he asked her to elope one night and, when she went in to get ready, she found the laundryman hadn't brought back any of her silk nightgowns, and she was ashamed to go in cotton. He got sore and lit out for New York, and she quit school and followed him there just in time to see him go off with a bare-legged dancer, a rotten dancer, too. That was the only thing she ever took so hard.

Juanita nodded to the sergeant to go on.

About three o'clock the major blew in, and

with him Lieutenant Nichols, all smiles. At the last minute, the major didn't have the heart to leave him back at Ville-sur-Cousances. I could see the lieutenant was looking for Alberta, but she was nowhere in sight and he couldn't leave the major to find her.

As we were standing there, we saw Smythe and Wallace lugging somebody down the trench, and as I ran up I realized it was Danny Trombla. I think the Germans must have suspected something was in the wind, because I never saw so many airplanes as crossed the sky that day, some of them flying low, but there never seemed to be an American plane or a French plane when a German showed up. I suppose they were all over the German lines. At any rate, they had set up an anti-aircraft gun on the hill where the ruined farm stood and had started shooting straight up into the air, to keep the planes up high. Trombla was the first to get it, although he wasn't badly hurt. His shoulder was broken and began to pain him so much that we lugged him out to the road and got a fellow with a sidecar to take him to the field hospital.

"Can you beat that for luck?" the major said. "Not one man left who can understand this bloody lingo."

That night at eleven o'clock, the whole countryside seemed to take a lurch forward. There's

no way to describe it. For miles, to the east and west, as far as a man could travel in a day, there were guns in every bush as big as this chair. Most of them were six-inch rifles, but they had even hauled the big navy guns on freight cars as near the lines as they would go, and after a half minute I couldn't even hear the battery that was right beside us, near the pathway over the hill. The shells were coming from miles behind us, and for half a mile in front, all the way to the Avocourt road, there were 75s shooting one-pound shells across the stretch between the American and German trenches. Florence Mason was on the switchboard when the first call came through.

"Louisville," she drawled, while the major stood by, and then she started marking figures on a sheet of paper. "One twenty-five, thirty-two, thirty, two times fifteen." Then she turned around.

"Major," she said, "shut that door, like a good fellow. I can't hear very well."

We blocked up the doorway with gunnysacks, so the dugout was as near sound-proof as it could be, but the concussion from the guns shook the whole hill and the noise of shells outside sounded like a lot of fire sirens blowing in a gale of wind. Lieutenant Snyder came in, and saluted.

"Is everything all right, sir?" she asked.

"You did a good job," he said. That was the

only compliment he ever paid her, directly, but he began to be proud of the station, because it worked better than any other in the sector. When the barrage continued ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour, we looked at one another, unable to believe it. Before that night was over, I couldn't even remember when it had ever been quiet. My jaws ached, from holding them tight together, and all my bones were sore from the shaking.

Then the first call came in French and Major McGregor stood around on one foot, wondering what it was all about. Florence went rigid as if she had gotten a shock. At that very minute Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes shoved his way into the dugout.

"What in the name of God is this?" he asked. The major looked flustered.

"How did this gang of women get up here?" he went on, and started bawling out the major. In the middle of it, Florence took off the receiver and shook them both by the shoulder.

"Do something, quick," she said. "The shells are falling short at twenty-three, one fourteen. They're killing our own men."

They hesitated, bewildered by her onslaught, and she lost her temper.

"Stop arguing, you fools, and do something.

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It's battery 'F' of the 50th," she said, and shoved them out the door.

Wallace was the first man handy, and Colonel Forbes hollered for him. The excitement of the shells and the frightful racket made Wallace act more effeminate than ever. He stood at attention while the colonel gave him a message for the commander of battery "F" and then saluted almost daintily.

"Now, don't you worry, colonel. I'll run right over there as fast as ever I can," he said, reassuringly. "I'll tell them they'll have to stop shooting those boys." And I thought the colonel was going to explode.

"Major," he said, watching Wallace skipping down the trench, "I can see you're a broad-minded man. If I wasn't so busy, I'd like to see your whole outfit in review."

And he jumped into his sidecar and the chauffeur tore over the pathway up the hill.

## VI

EVEN during the artillery preparation, reserve outfits kept tramping along the roads and some of the heavy guns were moved up ahead of us. They didn't take any precautions for a retreat. One battery of 155s unlimbered at the foot of the hill where our trench crossed the pathway, and, the

first time they fired, it blew my cap off and I bit my tongue. I kept out of doors as much as possible, to watch the flashes of light from the thickets and see the red lyddite shells bursting far ahead, and the violet-blue star shells coming up and shimmering on the German side, like distress signals. The Germans didn't seem to be firing back very much, although a shell or two of mustard gas landed in the woods not far from where we were. I saw plenty of machine guns go past, with one mule or a couple of men dragging them, but they were saving them for the moment the infantry was to go over. There was no let-up, except when they got into a traffic jam, and then the artillery kept roaring away all along the line, but the shells were passing high over us and the return fire got weaker and weaker.

In the meantime, the major had taken me into his dugout to explain the work for the next day. The first day's objectives were to take the infantry around Montfaucon on both sides, and on the second day they expected to take the big hill. The German dugouts were all facing the wrong way, but since the country for several miles behind the hill could not be held without Montfaucon, we planned to move right into their shelters unless they blew them up or left them full of traps. We didn't think they would dare do that, because

everything above ground must have been blown into powder in the first hour of firing, and planes were dropping bombs that would blow a hole fifteen feet deep in solid ground and would set off almost anything in their dugouts that wasn't buried too deep to do much harm. It all sounded so simple, as we talked it over, and just before daylight the major took me up through the woods to Avocourt to watch the infantry start out. Our telephone line was run as far as Avocourt and the next big switchboard was to be at Montfaucon. This was September 25, mind you. It makes me laugh to think of it, now, because the Germans didn't leave Montfaucon for a month afterward, and then only after five or six divisions had been shot up. It looked too easy, in the beginning, and all the boys were anxious to go as far as they could. Some of the outfits that found no resistance went beyond their objectives and that made it harder for us.

Before we got out of the woods, we went down into a narrow trench leading up to the front line, and at the edge of the flat, which kept lighting up with star shells, was a few heaps of rocks and a little charred wood.

"That's Avocourt," said the major.

It gave me a start, because Avocourt was on our map in good-sized letters and I had expected to see something to show for it. The flat was pocked

with shell holes with here and there a splintered stump sticking up a foot or two from the ground, and absolutely bare. I had heard them talk about No Man's Land until the sound of the words made me sick, but the phrase rang in my ears as I looked out over that band across the earth, like a dead branch in the midst of a green tree. As it began to grow light, I saw a dark shape like a cloud bulging in the air a little behind us and, as soon as dawn came, I found out it was one of a long row of captive balloons anchored about two miles apart all along the corps front, to direct artillery fire and report progress. As much as I had damned the army, I had to hand it to them for that drive. Nothing was overlooked, except the fact that the Germans might not leave Montfaucon.

The infantry went over at daylight, with bayonets fixed but no Germans in sight. Along the river, they got their objective two miles from Malancourt, and it was the same on the left. But those in the center ran into solid nests of machine guns and the German artillery, who knew the country like a book, concentrated their fire on the slope leading up the big hill. Within half an hour dozens of our guns were trained on the hill, but the German positions were on the safe side and there was no way of reaching them except from the air, and a fat chance a plane had of sailing out there in



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broad daylight. A field hospital was set up near Malancourt road and pretty soon the wounded began coming back in droves, some able to walk, others being carried by the stretcher bearers. Then shells began to fall around the trenches the infantry had just left, and farther back in the woods.

"We better clear out of here," the major said. "It's mustard gas, damn it, and that will stick in these damp woods for a fortnight."

It was late that afternoon they sent for you, wasn't it, Juanita?

We had good reports all day, except from that one section of the line in the center; but that held up traffic on all the roads behind us, and reserve regiments began to pile up on one another and were camped so thick there weren't dugouts or shacks enough to hold them. Nobody bothered us. Our switchboard was working every minute, with either Miss Snyder or Mason or Juanita on duty, and all our detachments were running rambast lines or digging ditches for the main conduits. About six o'clock, just after Danny Trombla got back, all bandaged up, a lieutenant from one of the divisional signal battalions came looking for the major.

"Can you lend us a man who knows French?" he asked. "We're going to run up another balloon to-night, and some of our directions will come from the Frogs across the river."

“I’ll go,” Trombla said, but he was hardly able to stand up. Lieutenant Snyder had overheard and she saluted the major and said, “Sir, may I send Corporal Ray? Her French is better than mine.” The strange lieutenant, who had not noticed the women, was surprised and at first he thought the major was kidding.

“Do you want to go up in a balloon?” he asked Juanita.

“Sure,” she said. “I’d like to go up, if the thing’s tied strong enough.”

The lieutenant was flabbergasted, but there was no other way out, so Juanita went up in the observation balloon and Trombla took her shift on the switchboard.

It was nothing, Juanita said. All I had to do was sit there and once in a while when they got some Frenchman on the telephone to tell them what he said and answer him for them. The phones were so bad that nobody could tell a man’s voice from a woman’s.

That night, I didn’t have much to do, Sergeant Horn went on, and the major had taken Mahan and some lineman up to Avocourt to see what could be done about continuing the main line. Big Mary Fahey was anxious to see what was going on, so I let her walk along with me. Avocourt was deserted, and the flat was shot up even worse

than before, but the firing there had quieted down and we went on toward the river, where the field hospital had been stationed. At the crossroads, we ran into the major and Mahan. It seemed that some new division was going to make its headquarters at Avocourt and the major wanted to run a line on stakes so they could be in communication with the corps right from the start.

"Give me a lift, Mary," said the big Canadian. He had become quite friendly with her, and they set off together to get a reel of wire. After the night before, everything seemed as quiet as a church, although the guns were rumbling far to the left and once in a great while a shell would land on the flat. It seemed to me that half of them didn't go off and, when they did, they just threw up a geyser of dirt or blew up an old stump. None of them hit the hospital.

As soon as I reached the hospital they put me to work. A line of ambulances drove up from the woods and the men who were worst off and still could be moved were loaded in. The shells came oftener as we worked and one of the ambulances was hit at the crossroads, but it must have been an accident since no more shells landed there. It didn't look to me as if the Germans were trying to do anything in particular, at any rate they weren't succeeding, but one of the men I bandaged told

me that one company of infantry had gotten past the machine-gun nests and started up the hill and the Germans had blown the ground right from under them.

"The whole country there is mined," he said.

Most of the men were hit in the legs, as the machine gunners had swept the ranks a foot or two above ground. I forgot all about the time, with all the excitement around, and the smell of blood and ether. Sometimes I would lift a stretcher into an ambulance, again somebody would yell for water or ask for a cigarette. The ones who were dying made the least noise of all and often would lie where they were until they got cold, without any one's noticing that they had passed out. God knows where they all came from. A French priest went from one stretcher to another, praying over the men who asked him to, and helping take care of the others.

All of a sudden Mahan and Wallace came staggering in, covered with blood and dirt and lugging Mary Fahey. A stray shrapnel shell had burst six feet from them, when they were unreeling wire, and the concussion had knocked both men over, but one of the scraps of iron had caught Big Mary right across the chest and laid her open from the shoulder all the way to the other side. Her clothes were soaked with blood.

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"Come over here," Mahan yelled, dragging a doctor by the arm.

"A woman," the doctor said, rubbing his eyes. He was so tired Mahan had to hold him up, but he pulled himself together and bent over Big Mary, who watched him with her jaw sagging down and her eyes dull.

"How are you, doc?" she finally said.

I could tell from the expression on his face that there was nothing he could do, but when she began twisting with pain, it made the blood flow faster and he motioned a medical sergeant to give her a shot in the arm. Mahan and Wallace looked as if they had both been killed, but neither of them had a scratch.

Right in the midst of everything, with wounded and dying men all around, and ambulances driving back and forth in the dark, Big Mary began to sing. Whatever they had shot into her had gone to her head.

*"Where are you going to sleep to-night?  
Said Bolicky Bill the sailor."*

It was so weird that nobody laughed, and Wallace leaned over and tried to coax her to stop.

"Here's a priest here, Mary," he said to her. "He won't like to have you sing that song."

She looked at him, but her eyes were hazy and she went right on bawling out the verses, but she sang slower and slower, like a patient going under ether, and Mahan tumbled to the fact that she was dying. He collared the priest and brought him over, and the priest got down on his knees and began to pray, as fast as he could talk.

"Tibi, Domine, commendamus animum famuli tui. . . . Quel nom?" he asked in French. Even Mahan understood.

"Mary Fahey, father," he said.

". . . Maria Fahey," continued the priest, "ut defunctus sæculo tibi vivat. . . ."

And Mary broke out again with the last verse.

*"Bugger the police and all the force,  
Said Bolicky Bill the S-a-i-l-o-r. . . ."*

"Et quæ per fragilitam humanæ conversationis peccata commisit, tu benia misericordissimæ pietatis absterge."

And at the last words, the blood welled up in her throat and trickled down the corners of her mouth, and she closed her eyes.

"Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen."

The priest got up and hurried to another stretcher, leaving us standing there.



## VII

It rained every day and the roads got so muddy that the trees on both sides were plastered. Water trickled through the logs that lined our dugouts so that everybody had colds and sore throats, and the mustard gas was so bad in the woods when the sun came out that five or six of the boys got into it and had to be sent back. The major had tossed away the plans with the objectives marked on them, and nobody knew exactly when we were going to move.

The road which had run through Avocourt and Malancourt had been shelled right off the map. There were acres of holes shaped like funnels, some of them three feet across, and some fifteen or twenty where the Jack Johnsons had landed. For thirty or forty yards the woods had been mowed right off three or four feet high, with splintered trunks and branches sticking up in all directions. Stragglers were wandering through the thickets, looking for kitchens where they could get a bite to eat, and boots, helmets, gas masks, leggings and torn blankets with blood on them were lying around everywhere. So much ammunition had been scattered through the brush and by the roadsides that two or three men were hurt by hand grenades they had kicked accidentally.

Most of the men in our outfit had been brought

up from Ville-sur-Cousances, but several who had the flu and all the girls were still camped there in the sheds. One night Lieutenant Snyder rode back on a truck to see how they were getting along and found them dancing to a banjo one of them had rigged up with fine wire and a cigar box.

They told her a German aviator in a French plane had flown over the road at noon the day before and had opened up with a machine gun on some men who were standing there waiting for the paper to be thrown off. Otherwise, nothing unusual had happened. One of the big ten-inch howitzers had been hauled across the creek there and boomed away once every hour at night.

Before morning, though, she was back at the switchboard, and she hadn't told them about Mary Fahey. She almost never mentioned that, although any one could see it was on her mind whenever she stopped to think.

Juanita's balloon was moved to the left, until it was four miles away and one of the chauffeurs had to take her over in a sidecar each morning before daylight.

I don't know how many divisions went in around Montfaucon, but the traffic around us, which had to come to a dead stop in the woods and make long clumsy detours, was more confused because men were moving both ways. Company after

company marched by, so tired the men couldn't hold up their guns, with eyes staring straight ahead and mouths half open. The word had gotten around that something had gone wrong, so the troops going in had the idea they were being led into a blunder. There were so many stragglers that the corps commander had to detail three companies of M.P.'s to round them up.

But the little trench and the dugouts we had taken over at Verrières Farms was a busy place, although it seemed, after the first day or two, to be miles away from the front. McCann, the dog-robber you met in Paris, looked after Lieutenant Snyder a little after Big Mary was killed, but he was taken with the mumps and we were all scared to death it would spread all through the outfit. He looked like a cartoon, with his face all wrapped up in one of Miss Snyder's undershirts, stretched out in a sidecar, but that was more than a week before we finally moved up again.

The major showed me where we were to go. He told me to take the same gang I had before, and to go ahead on a truck and set up the switchboard, but this time Lieutenant Nichols talked him into letting him go along. Our station was in a town called Cheppy, where the Germans had been when the drive started, about ten or twelve kilometers southwest of Verrières Farms. We found the place

this time without any trouble. The trenches and dugouts were made of concrete and there was even a concrete shower bath, but the Germans had taken out the fixtures and carried them along.

We cleaned out a big dugout just under the hill where the road led in from the south and, while Smythe and Florence Mason were tinkering with the switchboard, I took a walk around the village. It was the first town I had seen that the Americans had shot up, and it was flattened out even more than Avocourt had been. It was triangular in shape, on a low level, with steep hillsides on all three sides leading up to high plateaus, and at the northern corner, opposite our switchboard and nearest the German lines, a narrow valley brought in the small creek which traversed the town. Farther north, the valley had little tributary ravines, each one full of brush, which the Germans had used for machine-gun nests. Cheppy was right in the middle of what was called the Hindenburg line, where the whole country was peppered with little hidden shelters and fortifications, and the trenches, instead of stretching in a line parallel to the French on the other side, were cut up into irregular sections, so that a force attacking would find guns on all sides of it unless they cleaned up every inch of ground as they went along. The Germans had been there four years, so they had a little

cemetery, with now and then a French soldier's grave, and they had painted the latrines red, white and blue. That got Lieutenant Snyder so flustered she didn't know what to do, and one night Lieutenant Nichols got some white paint, somewhere, and painted the one the girls used without saying a word to her. I could see that he was trying to please her, all the time, but she was so busy he hardly ever got a chance to speak to her alone, and it seemed to me that she tried to avoid him. At that time I was too wrapped up in my own affairs, because Juanita was spending all her time up in a balloon with two lieutenants.

The first night after Nichols had painted the latrine, we had a terrific air raid and the corps camouflage officer came over in the morning and gave him hell for leaving that big white spot for a target, so Wallace had to cover it all over with branches while Florence Mason laughed at him when the lieutenant wasn't looking. Nothing got by that girl, and she could laugh at anything but herself, but, after the novelty of the work wore off, she began to get despondent again. All of the boys thought the world of her, but there wasn't one she really took a fancy to. We thought at first she had hit it off with Trombla, or at least Lieutenant Snyder did, but they turned out to be just good friends and spent hours kidding one another.

Of course, I had to do most of my talking to Juanita right there in the dugout with Florence. She would make all kinds of excuses to leave, and we would try to urge her to stay, although I am afraid I couldn't make it very convincing. She saw through a man so quickly.

Henry was jealous, Juanita broke in. I was crazy about my balloon job because it was so quiet up there and I had nothing to do. It used to give me the queerest feeling to see daylight come, with the mist swirling up from the fields and trees. We could see for miles around and, before the traffic stopped, the roads seemed to be crawling like snakes over the flats and the hills. It was exciting to see a wall or a clump of trees in the distance, with puffs of smoke and fire shooting up all around, too far, too short, then plunk, right in the middle. The cloud of smoke or dust would clear away and the trees would be stripped and thinned out to nothing. And we could see the flashes from the German guns, but the sounds never reached us.

I used to forget myself, sometimes, she said, as if I were on board a ship or high up on a mountain. You know what I mean. The lieutenants didn't think I was very sociable, I guess, because I hated to talk when I didn't feel like it. How can you talk, anyway, when you see things like that?

Sergeant Horn looked at her with a sort of



puzzled admiration, as if he had not been able, even after marriage, to fathom the relation between her thoughts and her inarticulate speech.

Time began to drag at Cheppy, even though we hadn't been there more than a week or ten days. The corps headquarters moved into the same valley, across from us, and the rumor was that we were all to spend the winter there, that the drive had failed and the war would drag on forever. During that time we had air raids every night, but only stray artillery fire, and most of our own artillery was still east of us, around Montfaucon. We were not shot up as badly as the other outfits because we worked in groups of four or five.

One afternoon, just before dark, when the sun came out for a moment or two, Danny Trombla came in to take over the switchboard and Lieutenant Snyder asked Florence Mason if she wanted to go for a walk. There was no danger, we all thought. In fact, for days, I had been expecting to move forward again, unless it was true that we were stuck for the winter. The nights were cold, but it was warm enough in the dugouts if you could get used to the stuffy air. I asked them if I could go along, so that Florence wouldn't think I was always trying to get rid of her, and we went on past the cemetery and up the valley which turned to the north. The sun had dropped behind

the clouds, leaving red streaks slashed across the west, and reflecting a hazy light, almost like Indian summer only pink instead of blue. A mile from town, we came across a grove of young fir trees, in a sheltered spot, and stood inside, between the slim trunks which looked like the pillars of a cathedral. We were standing there quietly, thinking about anything at all except war, when I heard footsteps near us, on the pine needles. I supposed a couple of our men had strayed out as we had, and I think the girls did not hear anything at first. Two men were walking along, heads down, not saying a word. The light was so queer that they were right on top of me before I noticed they had on round flat caps with a red band and green-gray uniforms. They saw us at the same time, and let out a yell. Then we all five stood looking at one another, foolishly, and they started to back away and then to run. Before I could move they were out of sight.

I have kicked myself a thousand times since then, but it came so unexpectedly that I didn't do a thing, except stand and gawk at them. They were young boys, like students, not eighteen years old.

Lieutenant Snyder stood there, with her automatic in her hand, and her face grew red. Florence was pale beneath her freckles.

"We'd better get out of here," I said, and we

started back, walking fast and looking over our shoulders before we crossed an open space.

"Do you think we should report this, sergeant?" Lieutenant Snyder asked me, just before we reached headquarters. She was afraid the corps headquarters would raise a howl about it, and still she thought it was her duty to let them know there were Germans around, even if there were only two of them, and schoolboys, at that.

Knowing what was on her mind, I offered to report the incident myself, and while I did not say right out that I need not mention that she or Florence was with me, she understood, all right. At first she hesitated, but she expected some higher officer to send her back any day, so she let me go ahead.

The major didn't pay much attention, except to kid me a little, so we all went to bed as usual and fell asleep.

## VIII

I WOKE up in the middle of the night with a feeling that something was wrong. I hadn't exactly been frightened that afternoon, because we had run on to the German boys too suddenly, but there was something uncanny about that valley and the ruined town which could not be seen from the plains all around. In the dugout it looked the same at all

hours, and my watch had stopped. As I was fumbling for a candle and dressing, I heard a couple of bombs land somewhere outside, but the dugout was so deep and well protected that I couldn't hear the plane.

As I came up to the surface of the ground, I heard a racket in front of headquarters. The motorcycle driver who was to take Juanita to her balloon started up his engine. He drove around the road which kept close to the hills, crossed the creek and brought up in front of the corner dugout where the switchboard was located and where the three women slept. I strolled over to say good-bye to Juanita and followed the road up to the edge of the flat, watching them until they turned east and then north again.

The stars were out, but the woods and the fields were almost hidden in the mist. I was so cold that I had to keep walking. In a few minutes I heard that peculiar drone high in the air, so loud that I knew there must be two or three planes, and as I looked up the starlight happened to flash on the wings of one of them, so I was able to follow their course for a second. They were drifting down toward Cheppy, and the sound of their propellers grew louder and louder.

Some anti-aircraft guns started popping in the woods and I stepped up close to a tree for fear of

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getting hit the way Trombla did. A couple of searchlights started sweeping across the sky, cutting each other's paths now and then, but never finding the planes. It was getting light enough so I could see three of them, in loose formation, circling over the town, but they didn't drop any bombs and I wasn't sure whether they were French or German.

It was such open country around Cheppy, and we were so far off the main roads, that it didn't seem as if we were in the midst of a drive at all. There were no other troops camped near us, and except for one or two detachments of prisoners marching back, we had seen few troop movements on the plains. The flat to the north had been swept over by the left wing of the corps during the first few days of the offensive and was still littered with helmets and gas masks and German stretchers.

The planes kept circling around, and soon I saw another flying low over the valley in which we had walked at sundown. I turned around to look for the balloons and saw three of them hanging in the air just above the mist and heard the American artillery miles to our right start rumbling away around Montfaucon. As I watched, a small speck appeared in the air high above the balloon at the extreme right and started down like a bird diving for a fish. There was a dull flash of white and yellow light and then black smoke rolled out in clouds as

the balloon crumpled and slid down toward the ground leaving an inky trail above the fog into which it disappeared.

I couldn't move. Before the smoke had cleared I saw the plane start over to the middle balloon in which Juanita was stationed. I started to run toward it, although it was miles away, stumbling across the field with my head up and my throat ready to yell but too dry to make a sound. There was another flash, the smoke poured out even blacker than before and the balloon collapsed almost leisurely and zigzagged down to earth, gaining speed as it fell. Only at that moment did I notice two white parachutes sailing in the air where the first balloon had exploded. I stopped and held my breath, and soon I saw three more drifting below the smoke from Juanita's balloon.

I didn't know what had struck me, Juanita said. All of a sudden I heard the lieutenant yell and point to the smoke, and then we saw this fellow flying right at us. One of the men popped away with a rifle, but it didn't do any good. I had a parachute strapped on, and the two men grabbed me and shoved me over the rail before the balloon caught fire. But then, when I was sailing through the air, expecting to land in a tree any minute, the German turned his plane around and flew right past me, waving his hand. I guess he saw my skirt,

because he turned again and flew even closer, so that I could almost see his face. Then four or five French planes came dropping down from the sky, and off he went toward Germany with them all after him. I hope they didn't shoot him down. He could have got all of us with his machine gun.

I saw the motorcycle coming, Sergeant Horn said, so I hailed it and the chauffeur took me back to where Juanita had landed. I walked along with the lieutenants, who were swearing about the aviation. When we got to Cheppy, men were standing around the dugouts, talking excitedly. A shell had struck right next to the cook shack at what was to be corps headquarters, ten minutes after the men had been lined up there for breakfast. The corps adjutant had issued orders for men to keep away from the cross roads and not to stand in formation for any purpose. As we were talking, two more shells came howling over in broad daylight, one of them demolishing the shower bath and the other tearing a big hole in the side hill. The third balloon had been hauled down, and our switchboard was busier than ever.

The whole business didn't look good to me. There was nothing in Cheppy but the headquarters office and the commissary and two companies of a labor battalion that was going to rebuild some of the roads. We seemed to be cut off from the rest

of the army which had advanced too far before it became evident that Montfaucon would hold out for another week or two. When Juanita first told me about the German having seen her skirt, I thought nothing about it, but as the day wore on and stranger things began happening, I connected it with the incident of the previous evening and began to believe that the Germans' sudden interest in Cheppy had resulted from our walk. They must have been puzzled about the women. I am sure Lieutenant Snyder had the same idea, because she was so pale and nervous and seemed on the verge of saying something to me whenever I came near her.

At dusk, our switchboard went blank, all at once. Trombla was right in the middle of a conversation when something cut him off. He tried to reestablish the connection, and no answer came. He could not even hear a click when he pulled out the plugs. Our own corps did not answer. The lines were all dead.

Florence Mason started going over the connections in the board while I went for the major. He rushed two trouble men over, and they started tracing back the wires. The whine of a shell raced down the valley and the explosion outside scattered dirt all over the door of the dugout. Another came, further right, then all the air broke up into

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bursting shells. The adjutant stuck his head in the doorway, to see what it was all about, and Lieutenant Snyder called him aside.

"I think I ought to tell the major that two Germans saw Florence and me in the valley just west of here," she said. "I should have reported it last night."

"Oh, he knows all about it," the adjutant replied. "Sergeant Horn told him."

Another shell exploded in the grave marked Franz Kreiger between the road and the dugout, the concussion nearly knocking us flat.

"You'd better go to some more sheltered place," Lieutenant Nichols said. "These dugouts all face the wrong way."

Of course the German gunners knew every inch of Cheppy.

"I shall stay by the switchboard, in case it begins to work again," she said. The shellfire didn't worry her much, but she still felt guilty about having kept silent about her encounter in the woods.

By that time the noise was so bad we had to stop trying to talk. It was the first time we had really been under fire, for the shells at Verrières Farms were mostly going over our heads toward the Germans. It was dark enough so the light from the explosions kept flashing like dots and dashes from a big radio.

To me it all seemed like a mistake, a mix-up of some kind. We had seen so many truck loads of stuff go forward and so many heavy guns rumble along at Avocourt, that we never thought about a counter attack. The corps commander, even, was planning to move into Cheppy and for ten days we hadn't bothered to carry our steel helmets, although we had orders to wear them.

The major came in, looking worried.

"It's a box barrage," he said, "and there isn't a machine gun in town. I don't understand what it means. There's nothing here they could want, except a lot of plans that are out of date."

Lieutenant Snyder stepped up, white and determined.

"I'll tell you, sir," she said. "The Germans Sergeant Horn told you about saw Florence and me yesterday, and another one flew within ten yards of Juanita this morning. They want to find out what this is all about."

"By God," said the major, "is that what's got into them?"

We were safe enough in the big dugouts, but there was a wall of fire which cut us off on both sides and behind. The only opening they didn't shell was the valley leading straight toward them. And I must admit they knew how to lay down a barrage. It was just like clockwork.

“Send a runner back to Avocourt and tell them to start a trouble man from the other end. Tell him to find out if the main line is cut,” the major said to me. Smythe already had his cap on, and I nodded.

Florence Mason and Danny Trombla were sitting on a bunk, side by side, and I thought Dan looked too happy for such an occasion, so I went over and sat on the other side of Florence and smelled red wine so strongly that I wondered why no one had noticed it before. Since the switchboard had gone dead, Florence had been drinking from a canteen filled with Pinard which Danny had bought from a Frog in charge of some prisoners. Usually, artillery fire or any kind of excitement made her lively, but this time she got bluer and bluer, as she used to at Ville-sur-Cousances.

“Don’t let the officers get a whiff of your breath,” I said to her.

“Oh, bother the officers,” she said, in a tone I was afraid the others would hear above the bombardment. “A good drink is just what they need.”

I motioned to Dan to lay off and then went back to the board. Just as I got there, the trapdoor opened and Wallace signaled for me to come up. He was so much out of breath he could hardly stand and the noise outside drowned what he was trying to say, but as soon as I got far enough up

the ladder I saw he had lugged in Mahan, who was all shot up. The adjutant helped us get him down the ladder, and when the major saw who it was, he just about went crazy. The major had depended more on Mahan than on anybody else in the outfit.

The big lumberjack was dead. Any one could see that. "This is what comes of all this monkey-business," he said, turning on Lieutenant Snyder. "Here's the whole battalion up the spout and the best soldier that ever walked is dead because you and your lady friends thought you had to see the war."

I know he didn't mean what he said, but he was so much upset by everything that was happening that he picked up what she had said about taking a walk. The old man really thought she was a brick, but she took it harder than he meant it. Her face got white as chalk and the muscles quivered around her jaw.

"Very well," she said. "If I have brought on all this trouble, I will satisfy their curiosity." And she started up the ladder.

The major looked ashamed of himself, but he was a stubborn Scotchman and he hesitated just long enough for her to get out of hearing. The rest of us were dumfounded. The barrage was falling on all sides of us, and not upon the middle of the



town, but I realized she intended to go up the valley.

Meanwhile Florence Mason had gotten to her feet. She didn't understand exactly what had taken place but she felt Alberta had been insulted.

"I'll go, too," she said. "So long, major." And she went up the ladder and started running after the lieutenant, who had gotten a fair start. Lieutenant Nichols didn't wait to ask permission, but set out, too, and I followed after them, feeling foolish but not knowing what else to do. Farther up the ravine I heard that rat-tat-tat like riveting hammers which meant machine guns. They were coming, all right.

The commander of the labor battalions camped at the mouth of the valley had sent out his men with rifles and hand grenades, and had hidden them behind rocks and bushes on the slopes, to fire down on the Germans, when they advanced, but everybody knew there was not a chance of stopping them. Lieutenant Snyder had nearly reached the ravine before the adjutant caught up with her, but she brushed him away and started up the valley, faster than ever. Florence was still ahead of me, and I saw an officer stick his head out from behind a clump of rocks and wave us back, but Lieutenant Snyder paid no attention. The road fol-

lowed the old creek bed straight up to the grove of evergreens.

It was more quiet in the narrow part of the valley, because the shells were all falling behind us, but we hadn't gone more than one hundred yards before I saw a swarm of men in gray deploying on the slopes beyond the grove, and all at once machine guns opened up on both sides and I saw our labor troops come running back, falling and rolling down the hillsides as they ran. Not many of them got out of range.

Lieutenant Snyder went out of her head, I guess. She waved both arms for them to stop and started running right toward the machine guns, with Florence, the adjutant and me tagging along like lunatics. At the edge of the grove, she couldn't keep going any longer and stopped short, leaning against a tree. I guess the Germans were more puzzled than our own soldiers, for the machine-gun fire was shut off quick, and the first thing I knew there were men closing in all around us, with grenades in their hands or bayonets set, but not one of them fired. I don't remember everything that happened, except that it seemed to me like a slow movie, as if every one was crawling at a fantastically slow rate, exaggerating their movements and making ridiculous faces.

Florence sat down flat in the roadway and a



squad of Germans started after her from behind. She heard them and took the pill from her cartridge belt, laughing and waving her hand, quite tipsy. Lieutenant Snyder made a dive to stop her but she had already swallowed it. As the Germans tried to pick her up, she stiffened, then curled up backward as if she were trying to touch her head with the soles of her feet, and a German officer came up and said something to the men, who dropped her and went on. Then the officer doubled up just like a jack-knife.

I didn't hear the shot, but I remember seeing Lieutenant Snyder with an automatic smoking in her hand and her jaw dropping as if it had gone off by mistake, and then I sat down, as if I were in a dream, and wondered why I couldn't move my legs. Four men grabbed her and pinned her arms and I saw the adjutant crawling around on his hands and knees and digging at his eyes, and then I caught a whiff of tear gas, too, and began choking and crying until I passed out. . .

It's a shame she didn't come back, he said very gravely. I always thought she would come through somehow. It's a shame.



PART FOUR



*Schoolmaster Weller*





THE dawn was drifting inland from the harbor as I took the ferry back to Boston, and the tugs were already plying among the islands and the scows at anchor. Curiously projected upon the expanse of dim gray waterfront before me were fragments of Sergeant Horn's story. After remaining more vivid than ever throughout the night, Alberta Snyder had vanished once again, this time even more irrevocably, although there persisted in my mind a stubborn resistance to the idea that she was dead. When I thought of Lida Wetherby, I was numb with disappointment, knowing that if I should tell her what I had just heard, her suspense would be harder to bear.

The question as to whether or not I should go to see Lida Wetherby was settled automatically for me that very day. I met my old city editor on Washington Street, and since I had suggested to him several weeks before that I might be in need of a job, he hailed me and told me there was a vacancy in the Ruhr, that the man they had had in Europe had broken down.

The arrangements were quickly made and

there was every reason for haste, in view of the tense situation in the zones newly occupied by the French, so the next day at sundown I was watching the islands of the harbor draw back, one by one, and the large and small craft weave slowly in and out between the buoys which marked the boundaries of the channel. The city, with the sun lighting it from behind, hunched together like a great gray snail with the Custom House tower for a head. Then the pilot boat came alongside, the waterfront reporters shook hands with me, and I was on my way out to sea. It was still too early in the season for the boat to be crowded with tourists, so half the cabins were empty. My solitary instincts kept me away from the other passengers, and I walked the deck or lay in my steamer chair, reading haphazardly about the events which had led up to the Ruhr controversy, reviewing German grammar, and assimilating the new facts I had learned about Alberta Snyder during the few weeks I had spent in the States.

In Paris, after trying unsuccessfully to find McCann, I made a hasty round of the official bureaux, getting quantities of mimeographed statistics and little else and it became more apparent than before that I must go at once into Germany. On the way, I passed through the battlefield areas for the first time since the war and the sight of the

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ugly brick villages in place of the picturesque hamlets which had been destroyed gave me a feeling of nausea. Here and there were war ruins, preserved cold-bloodedly as reminders, and stacks of barbed wire which had been stripped from the fields were stacked by the right of way, rusty and unsightly. American metal windmills clanked in the places of the old mills with the four long deliberate blades, and in the cafés near the stations mechanical pianos jangled out demoded tunes. All this depressed me and brought the destruction of war more rudely in contact with my nerves than had the crumbling walls of the plaster houses or the dying orchards in war time. Since John McCann had started me thinking about war again, it seemed as if I found its deepest scars wherever I turned. I was headed for a war between unarmed Germans and French schoolboys, this time as a civilian. Wars were going on desultorily in Russia and Africa and China and South America. It was as if the larger war had stopped and turned in its tracks, like a beast, waiting for its smaller brood to amble up to its protecting hulk.

At Liège, where I had an hour between trains, I tried to find some evidence of atrocities, or anything that would make a story, and nearly lost my train in doing so. It was at the German border that I suddenly became intrigued with my assignment,

because after waiting in a little board shack for a half hour, I was given 1,860,000 marks for fifty francs and I bought a box of matches for the pre-war equivalent of \$250.

The rathskellers in Köln were patronized almost exclusively by British soldiers, and the proprietors of stores hurried to the bank windows several times a day in order to try to adjust their prices to the falling exchange, but there was no friction between the inhabitants and the occupying forces and I went at once to the principal travel agency to inquire as to my chances of getting to Essen, where the trouble was acute. It was impossible, I was told. A bridge had been blown up on the railroad the French had taken over just two days before; the civilians were forbidden to move from one town to another. All strangers were arrested on principle. I might reach Düsseldorf, the clerk said, but Essen was out of the question.

Notwithstanding the misgivings of the agents, I decided to try. My last few hours in Boston had been spent in gathering credentials which might be used under a variety of circumstances. I had had forwarded to me another letter from the President's secretary, whose note had helped me in Washington, and one from the Secretary of State. I got an endorsement from two or three prominent radicals and also from some German friends of a German

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orchestra leader whose internment had attracted international attention, following his reluctance to play "The Star-Spangled Banner." In Paris I had gathered a friendly communication from the Minister of War and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the American Ambassador and the secretary of the American Chamber of Commerce. My passport was in order, with French and German visas. So I took a train for Düsseldorf and in the station there I saw a French adjutant who looked like a good fellow. I explained to him that I was an American newspaperman and wanted to go to Essen, and he seemed to have no objection. He even bought my ticket for me.

I felt so safe by his side, because of his red and gold braid that I invited him to have a drink and got my only impression of Düsseldorf from the terrace of the café across from the railroad station. There was little traffic in the streets, French flags flew from the public buildings, soldiers in faded horizon blue loafed in the waiting rooms or strolled up and down the main street. The adjutant was homesick. He complained at having to stay in such a place when he should have been discharged months before. The wine was bitter, he said, and the girls had thick ankles. His pay was so small that even with the exchange as it was, he could scarcely manage to keep alive. He also advised me not to go

to Essen, since conditions were still worse there, but when the train was made up, I climbed aboard.

The train consisted mostly of box cars and was filled with soldiers. No one asked for my ticket, which I put away as a souvenir, and although the military police at Essen stopped me as I was about to leave the station, my American passport, the letters from the French ministers and the fact that it was nearly lunch time influenced them to let me pass. The city was dismal, indeed. There was no street traffic, except for a few street cars in bad repair which bumped over the tracks, which ran dangerously near the sidewalks. French recruits, with no two uniforms which matched, straggled here and there, always out of step, while the civilians standing in groups on the corners showed disgust upon their faces and murmured to one another. In the alleys and side streets, gambling games were in full swing, windows were broken, gutters littered with refuse and the gaunt factory chimneys were cold and extinct.

The only taxicab in the city stood in the square near the station, on tires made of cord and rope. The stores were open, but had nothing to sell; women and even well-dressed men kept off the streets as much as possible and at night all houses were locked and most of the ground-floor windows boarded. There were no German police, the hotel



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clerk said, and the street lamps did not function. I chose the nearest hotel, which had been occupied up to a few days previous by French officers. The corridors were unswept and all the woodwork scarred. Nearly everything breakable had been broken and the service was performed by a clumsy girl who was almost feeble-minded. I was the only guest on the entire floor and had my choice of a long row of rooms, all of which were in a sad state. The restaurant had been closed, although I was able to get coffee in the morning by waiting for the clerk to make it on an oil stove. After a day or two, he began to talk to me a little more freely, once he was convinced I was not a French spy. He advised me not to use the mails, saying that all letters would be opened or destroyed.

Most of the relief work, I found, was being carried on by the Quakers; after a long search through the city I found a tall, gaunt woman who spoke English and was most anxious to give me information, and she spent the afternoon taking me from house to house where babies were dying because the milk supply had been two or three days late in arriving. But the excursion told severely on my nerves. I never have been rugged enough to look misery full in the face. After a quiet meal and several steins of beer I was able to write my impressions of the city and the gruesome facts which had

been brought to my attention, but the deserted hotel and the dead city made me so uneasy I could not stay in my room and, against the entreaties of the hotel clerk who kept a revolver under his hand at all times and was afraid of being deported if the French found it, I started out that evening to walk the streets. There were certain small beer halls on some of the side streets in which there seemed to be traces of merriment and after walking by several times I got up my courage to enter one which had a sign to the effect that family patronage was solicited. There were no soldiers in the crowd which nearly filled the place and the men and women sitting at the tables looked at me suspiciously and lowered their voices. I was about to go out again when I noticed among the customers at the large round center table a man who had helped me at the city hall, and he recognized me at the same time and passed the word around that I was an American, inviting me to join his company.

Every one was drinking beer and talking, and periodically some one would rap for silence and a zither player in the corner would play some sentimental waltz or strum an accompaniment to a ballad. Before long I learned that most of the men with whom I was seated had been officers in the German army. Soon the tables were pushed back and some of them began dancing, so I ordered three

or four bottles of Rhine wine, trying to pay for it unostentatiously, and later was introduced to some of the girls and began whirling around the floor to the tune of the zither which could scarcely be heard. There was a broken-down piano in the room and after the proprietor had been induced to take a drink or two, one of the former lieutenants began to play on it. When he got tired, I thumped out an American tune which they all applauded. A French sentry looked in and I filled his canteen with Rüdeshheimer and told him to come back if he wanted more. He thanked me and left us alone.

Men and women who have been miserable too long, or who have grown stiff in the shackles of unaccustomed poverty, get an accumulated thirst for gaiety which causes them to gulp it eagerly when it is unexpectedly offered to them. And so, as the Rhine wine was poured more freely and the music grew less restrained, the oddly-assorted roomful of people became strangely homogeneous and the evening which had commenced so quietly developed into a healthy carouse. I found myself so well able to speak German that I carried on long conversations and danced strange dances with no hesitation. My sheaves of marks seemed inexhaustible and as elated as I was I could not help being ashamed of having so much money I had never earned. The former officers started clicking glasses and exchang-

ing anecdotes and somehow, in the hubbub, I caught the word Cheppy. It cleared my head in an instant.

"Were you at Cheppy?" I asked of the lieutenant who had mentioned the town. "Were you at Cheppy, in the Argonne?"

"Six months," he said. "Were you there, too?"

Here my German failed. I tried to explain that I knew others who had been there, but he did not understand exactly and arose, extending his hand.

"Then we have been enemies," he said, with a whimsical smile. I let him think so, since it formed a bond between us, and he went on to say that if I wanted to hear the story of the German occupation of Cheppy I should see Schoolmaster Weller, who had spent the last two years of the war in that vicinity.

II

How fortunate it is to have so little business of my own that I can be so completely wrapped up in the affairs of others, I thought the next morning as I started out to look for Schoolmaster Weller. During my few days in Essen, less than at any other time since I had formed the nightly habit of listening to John McCann, had the 213th field signal battalion been in my mind. I had been intrigued by the fundamental misunderstandings in the Ruhr and the grotesque physical consequences

of political maneuver. But the mention of Choppy, the very point at which Jacques Hertz's narrative had descended into the air, stirred my curiosity like a swarm of bees and even the faint prospect of learning something from the other side of that green line of sensation excited me beyond all reason. I forgive my work, for the moment, and persuaded the tall Quaker woman to leave her soup kitchen, sewing class and dying children long enough to take me to the school in which Weller taught. As we walked through the city, she kept pace with me with difficulty and kept up a continual stream of talk about the troubles of her charges, although I am afraid I listened rather carefully. Nearly every one we passed spoke to her and I think one of the reasons the German officials and business men were so kind to me was that I was often seen in her company.

In the tremendous enclosure which contained the main Krupp works was a small schoolhouse, and the Quaker woman led me up the well-worn steps and knocked upon a door numbered 6, on the second floor. All around were blackened chimneys, gas reservoirs, coal bins, cranes, vertical boilers, transformers with acres of wires and hundreds of green-glass indicators for pyro, tanks on high rollers and acres of broad grey roofs and shaded pathways. Some work was going on, for when doors

were opened there would be flashes of coals or the stutter of riveters. In the small building, however, was the familiar schoolroom smell, rows of hooks upon which small coats and caps were hung, gongs and shabby corridors and blackboards dusty with chalk. Schoolmaster Weller opened the door and upon seeing us brought the class to attention. His pupils were boys ranging in age from ten to fifteen, with heads shaved close and neatly patched clothing. The Quaker woman introduced me as an American journalist who was going to do a great deal for Germany, but I saw at once that Weller smiled understandingly and realized that I had no great hopes of doing much for anybody. He was a small, soft-spoken man with very intelligent eyes and a military bearing which fitted him most incongruously, and he spoke English accurately but in phrases which suggested copy books of the early nineteen hundreds. As soon as the Quaker woman had left, he dismissed the class and walked with me through the foundries and workshops, explaining technical details now and then but most of all impressed, as I was, by the spectacle.

"I have learned to love these machines and dynamos and ovens and smokestacks as my wife loves her window geraniums," he said. "I look at them, hour after hour."

"They are more beautiful than statues," I re-

marked, and he laughed, for we were standing in front of the statue of Krupp, himself, in a cast-iron afternoon coat which must have weighed several tons.

Unable to keep off my subject any longer, I added:

"Herr Lahm tells me that you were stationed at Cheppy."

"Yes. I was sent there late in 1916," he replied. "And I was arrested just north of the town a few days before the armistice. Some of the higher officers were suspicious of me because in school I had been a pacifist. When there was danger of a revolution, they locked up many of the radicals. But when I got back home to Essen the republicans kept me in jail overnight because I had been an officer. There was great confusion."

I had hoped so earnestly that he would have some information about Alberta that I could not bring myself to ask the question directly, but as soon as we began talking of the war and the Argonne, he resolved my doubts without prompting.

"There was little else except confusion those last days," he went on. "Persistent reports came to us that we were opposing an army of women, and in trying to find out about it, our battalion was caught and fell far behind the general retreat, so that our losses were frightful just at the time when

the men had begun to hope they would escape."

"And you?" I inquired.

"I was wounded four times on other fronts, but never after 1916," he said.

"Did you see any women at Cheppy?" I asked, and my heart began pounding in the short interval between my question and his answer.

"We took one woman alive and another dead," he said. "But God only knows what they were doing in such a place. I never thoroughly understood that."

"Was her name Snyder, the prisoner you took alive?"

"Hermann called her Alberta. That has as lovely a sound in German as in English," he replied.

"And who is Hermann?" I asked.

"My best friend," Weller said.

It was past lunch time, so I invited the school-master to have lunch with me; but he said his wife would be worried if he did not come home and we arranged that I should call at his house late in the afternoon and that he and his wife should dine with me that evening. He seemed anxious to tell me all he knew about Alberta or to help me in any way that he could.

That afternoon I had an appointment with Herr Lahm, at the city hall, who showed me folders and folders of statistics giving the number of

men who had been employed at various trades before and after the occupation, the effects of passive resistance, data concerning military trials and expulsions, birth rates, death rates and countless other facts; but I could not keep my mind upon what he was saying. I copied figures idly, nodded and said yes or no to appear polite and appreciative, but it was useless for me to try to concentrate. As soon as I could get away, I rushed to the hotel with my papers and, with the aid of the indispensable clerk, got aboard a trolley car headed eastward across the river. The clerk had told the conductor where I should get off and I had Weller's written directions besides.

The house in which he lived, like all the other houses in Essen at that time, was badly in need of paint and repairs, but in his small apartment on the second floor, everything was neat and colorful, with flowers blooming in the window boxes and rows of books in three languages covering two of the walls. His wife, Johanna, was a small Westphalian woman with honey-colored hair, a clear white complexion and light blue eyes. She was dressed in an old-fashioned dress somewhat out of season, for which Weller at once apologized.

"My pay for a whole year would not quite buy a dress," he said, and she smiled in a deprecatory way and suggested that we go to dinner without her.

I insisted, of course, that she come with us, so she brought in their two girl children, both of whom resembled her, and went downstairs to ask a neighbor to stay with them during the evening.

Assuming that Weller would know the restaurants of Essen better than I did, I asked him to suggest a place to eat and he said they had not been in a restaurant since the war.

"It is harder for me than for the workers," he said, "because my pay comes from the government and cannot be raised to meet the exchange oftener than once a month."

Johanna put on a hat which reminded me of some of the paintings in the Louvre and we all took the street car back to the center of Essen. On the main street was a large hotel dining room on the ground floor which had been kept open in spite of the hard times and we sat in one corner of the enormous room, utterly alone except for the flat-footed waiter, until a party of French officers entered and took the opposite corner, quite out of hearing. As we entered the dining room, I noticed Johanna's eyes were shining with excitement and she consulted happily with her husband over the menu while the waiter stood by and made helpful suggestions concerning the meal, letting the officers wait an interminable time for their beer. Again I felt ashamed, for each time I let my hand fall down

to my side it brushed my pocket in which was a sheaf of 100,000-mark notes as thick as a pack of cards and at the bank that afternoon four worried men had gathered around to look wistfully at my five-dollar bill and had agreed to change three dollars of it.

III

EVERYBODY in the army knew in November of 1918 that the war was over, that we had lost, Weller began. Some of the higher officers tried to keep the news from their commands and the newspapers claimed, even after we had seen regiments of American soldiers, that it would be years before the United States could train troops and send them across. Naturally, none of us wanted to be killed in the last few days, after we had remained alive through four years.

I think it was in August, he continued, when the youngest class, about eighteen years old, was called out. Two young students interested in philosophy were sent to my company, which was made up for the most part of small shopkeepers or skilled workmen, and I used to talk with them, to refresh their memories and my own, when I could do so without being too conspicuous. Also I spent as much time as possible with Colonel Müller, our regimental commander, who had been opposed by

stronger forces for months and had been the victim of so many blunders by his superiors that I was afraid his health was breaking down. He was a splendid soldier, severe in principle and very lenient in practice. Nearly all of the men liked him and he had shielded me more than once from high officers who were afraid of my radicalism.

Schoolmaster Weller smiled ruefully at the last word.

One day, after Colonel Müller had been under a terrific strain trying to continue the defense of Montfaucon and had found himself surrounded by one fresh American division after another and bombarded by more artillery than he had ever seen gathered together, one of his inexperienced air scouts, who had been given a French mail plane to fly, reported having seen a regiment of American women in brown uniforms with skirts. The report had gotten higher up, where it was suspected that the troops might have been Scottish and it was important to know whether there were Scotch troops in that sector, so Colonel Müller was ordered to investigate; and he asked me to find out what I could. I took no stock in the story, of course, but I had to select the members of my company in turn to go out in pairs to reconnoiter and several of them were shot by pickets. When it came the turn of the two young students, I could not help taking them aside

and advising them to be careful. I had no hope of getting any useful information and I couldn't bear to have the boys get hurt for nothing.

"The war is over," I told them. "And the Fatherland will need philosophers more than anything else."

That night the two boys returned saying they had encountered armed women in the woods north of Cheppy. I questioned them very closely, for nothing seemed less probable than that America, with more man power than any of the nations engaged and at the greatest distance from the battlefields, should be exposing women to gas and shell-fire. Still the colonel was a reasonable man and the boys were intelligent, so I decided to tell Colonel Müller what they had told me. I should have understood what a state his nerves were in and should not have reported the incident.

I found the colonel dozing on his table, although it was the middle of the morning and not two minutes before he had told the orderly to admit me. Even then, I did not have sense enough to spare him. He listened dully to what I said, sat silent a moment and then began to cry, reaching for the telephone. To my horror, he insisted upon speaking directly to the Kaiser, shouting it over and over again and sobbing. At that moment I realized what I had done and tried to calm him. Finally I

persuaded him to go to bed and helped him undress, telling the orderly to let no one come in. He slept until noon, and as soon as he awoke sent for Hermann Luttenschlager.

"Hermann," he said, "you are not crazy. I want you to find out what troops are at Cheppy, and if there are women, let me know the reason. Until our heads fly apart, there must be reasons for things. Reasons, I tell you . . ."

And the old man began to get excited again. Hermann thought he had had an attack of nerves and to humor him promised to go out the next morning and report on the situation. He was the best flier in our sector and had been my roommate in school.

Before the war we were Socialists, Hermann and I. (Weller laughed.) You know how earnest young men can be. When we were ordered to mobilize Hermann took it harder than I did, and got himself into the aviation in order to have it over quickly. I, who started out making inventories of groceries in the quartermaster corps, was on every front and hurt four times, but each time I got a rest and was never wounded seriously. Hermann never got a scratch. He was too careful, by instinct. His engine was always well cared for, his gun never buckled and his photographs were always properly exposed. He never fought if he could help it, and

each time he was attacked the other man got reckless. It was a queer paradox, because Hermann after a month or two didn't care at all what happened to him and after he had got such a reputation no one dared touch him. He even refused to drink the Kaiser's health at mess. But he couldn't be sloppy in what he did, so he went on year after year while his whole unit was killed two or three times around him.

The morning after Colonel Müller had called him in, Hermann set out on his usual rounds and, seeing the air was clear, dropped down on a captive balloon behind Cheppy and set fire to it. There was another a few miles away, so he headed over that way and fired into the gas bag, but instead of trying for the third balloon, as he thought the French fliers would expect him to do, he circled sharply around and passed by the parachute of one of the observers. There was a woman, dangling beneath the parachute.

He almost let go of the stick and broke his neck he was so much surprised, but he wheeled again, to make sure his eyes had not played a trick on him; and then enemy planes began dropping out of the air above and he had to make a run for it.

"If the colonel has gone mad, so have I," he said to me as we were washing up for mess. "I shot

down a balloon this morning, and out of it jumped a woman."

I sat down on the bench and laughed.

"How long since you have been on leave?" I asked him. "Perhaps all the trees look like women?" But I found, once I had started laughing, that I couldn't stop. Our nerves were all on edge, and I kept on until Colonel Müller came over to see what had amused me so.

"What are you laughing at?" the colonel said to me, suddenly and very gruffly. He had just gotten out of bed again. His tone startled me so that I let out the words before I thought.

"Hermann thinks he sees women in the air," I said, still laughing.

Then the colonel went right out of his head.

"Women!" he shouted. "You see women, too, Hermann? I've had enough of this. My head roars all the time. They send me schoolboys for soldiers and march away and leave me on a hill with Americans all around, and now it's women. I'll find out myself what it's all about." And he rushed into his dugout.

I looked at Hermann in dismay. Only that morning I had heard we were to retreat at last, before it was too late. But the colonel ordered Cheppy to be cut off with a barrage and told me to get my company ready to lead the others down the ravine

and into the town. I believed the old man was insane, but there was no way of disregarding the orders. Hermann and I decided that if I brought back a man or two to show the colonel, he would be satisfied.

We started out, after the artillery preparation, and met with little resistance, but before we reached the limits of the town I saw two women coming right out to meet us.

"Catch them and let's get out of here," I told the sergeant, still hoping no lives would be lost. But one of the girls was dead when we reached her. There wasn't a mark on her, and her face was contorted frightfully. Later I learned she had poisoned herself. What a pity! The other one, who wore the insignia of a lieutenant, shot Lieutenant Strumm through the stomach before we grabbed her. The minute she had been overpowered, I ordered our men to turn back, although I should have gone on into Cheppy to make a complete investigation.

When we got back to Landres-Saint-Georges, the Colonel was a little more calm. With a woman there before his eyes, he was better able to cope with the situation and knowing that I spoke a little English he asked me to question her. At once I noticed that she was more hysterical, if possible, than the rest of us. In all four years of war, I had never been so unstrung. All the way down the ravine,

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where a few months before I had taken my afternoon walks, I was debating with myself whether I was doing right in taking those boys under fire again or whether I should have reported my colonel insane and taken the consequences. Some American troops armed only with rifles had hidden behind the bushes and rocks and when I heard our first machine gun and saw them rolling down the hill, I felt like a butcher.

I had been trying to keep calm so long, that the first glimmer of hope for an ending of the war broke down my resistance. You Americans had one or two quick engagements, mostly in the open. For us, there were endless months of waiting, living in the mud and rain, fighting off attacks by the French, the English, Scotch, Australians, even negroes, getting sick and then getting well again, smelling the same foul stench, eating the same tasteless food, while the news from home grew blacker and blacker and new nations joined our enemies. Half the time I wished I could die, but when danger came I would try to save myself, thinking I might be sent to a safe place later on. And all of us except the utter fools knew that we must lose.

Of course, the woman would tell us nothing. She pretended not to understand German, so we spoke English and tried to be polite and every once





in a while Colonel Müller would break in to ask me what we were saying. In the midst of the questioning, I was called out to check up the papers and insignia of the other girl so that I was not there while Alberta was searched perfunctorily. Hermann has told me the story many times. In a pocket of her cartridge belt he found a pill wrapped in tissue paper. She tried to snatch it from him. All at once Hermann understood what had happened to the other girl. We had heard that some of the Russian women had carried poison to prevent their falling into the hands of their political enemies, and we had read some of the atrocity stories which had been circulated about us. Hermann was terribly sensitive on that point and turned red as fire.

"There's no use taking it from me. It didn't occur to me to use it," she said. "Perhaps I am a coward after all."

"Coward?" asked Hermann. "In what respect? I have been nearly captured forty times. Do you think I would kill myself, even if the most rapacious of women overpowered me? I would take a good rest and improve my English."

Colonel Müller sat weakly in his chair. His cheeks began to jump and twitch and his eyes filled with tears. Hermann explained to Alberta in English that the colonel was very tired and that he had thought he was losing his mind when he found him-

self opposed by an army of women. She looked at him, almost without comprehension at first, but her face began to relax, as if just at that moment it had come to her that we all had been through hell. She began to be sorry for the old man. There is nothing better for a woman than to be sorry for some one. Hermann thought the situation was saved but behind him just then came two stretcher bearers with the body of the other American girl and the blanket had slipped so that her dead face, twisted like a face in a crooked mirror, stared upward, eyes wide open. If only we could have prevented that.

Alberta didn't fall, at first, so Hermann was able to catch her, but she stiffened and began to clack her teeth together and stared at the dead girl's face as if it charmed her like a snake. Colonel Müller began to yell and dig into his eye sockets with his fists and while they were in the midst of all that an orderly arrived with an urgent dispatch. I followed him into the room. I have never seen a tableau more ghastly. Hermann was holding up Alberta and trying to keep her from biting her tongue. The corpse held its hideous expression upon the stretcher. The orderly stood stiffly at attention while Colonel Müller sat fumbling the unopened dispatch and moaning to himself.

During several minutes Schoolmaster Weller

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had grown more tense as he was talking, raising his voice and moving his hands excitedly. Johanna, who had been watching him, understanding nothing of what was being said, reached over and touched his arm.

"It is not good for you to talk about the war," she said, in German, and he relaxed.

IV

I COVERED the dead girl's face, Weller continued, helped Hermann lift Alberta to the colonel's cot and then took the dispatch from Colonel Müller's hand. He had ceased to notice what any of us were doing, and was nodding drowsily in his chair. The orders directed him to withdraw at once to Nouart, by way of Buzancy. Nouart was a small town, formerly a railroad junction, near the Belgian border. At Hermann's suggestion, I wrote out an order for the battalion officers, aroused Colonel Müller sufficiently for him to sign it, and sent it by orderly to the ranking major. Troops were called to their quarters and within an hour we were ready for a night march, but the road between Landres and Buzancy had collapsed completely because of the heavy load our artillery had placed upon it, so we had to leave everything behind us that we could not carry on our backs. News of our attack upon Cheppy must have reached the American artillery,

for shells began to fall upon Landres, knocking down some of the few remaining buildings and wounding so many of our men that the problem of marching became still more difficult. Each fresh disaster weighed more heavily upon me, since I blamed myself for having brought the reports about women to the colonel's attention once too often.

My men were ready and waiting beside their packs long before the order to march was given, but on account of the shell fire I was obliged to scatter them. What few wits I had left were concentrated upon saving their lives. At the battalion headquarters I met Hermann again and he asked me if I did not think we had better persuade the woman prisoner to go back to her own lines. We had both seen enough shellshock to recognize the symptoms.

"We have no way of taking care of her, and with us she is sure to be hurt," he said. I saw no objection, so we went into the small room where she was lying on the cot and Hermann spoke to her. She lay so listlessly that I could not tell whether she understood what was being said or not, but as soon as Hermann asked her to go back to the American lines she sat up frantically and said that she must kill herself, that she had failed.

Hermann is a very patient man and very quick to read what is in a person's mind. We knew that

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she blamed herself for the other girl's death and for her own failure to carry out what her comrade had done. He sat down beside her and tried to reason with her. As the time approached when we were obliged to go, Hermann suddenly made up his mind. It was out of the question to quarter her with male prisoners. We had no hospital.

"I'll take her home with me," he said. "Mother can take care of her for a few days, then the war will be over and she can go where she likes. I can be of no use in covering this retreat."

It was quite dark, and less than two hours' flight to the Rhine, so Hermann tuned up his motor and told her to get up and follow him. He had an almost hypnotic influence over her, in her apathetic state, and already she had become accustomed to his voice. By promising her that she should not be sent back to the American lines, he got her to agree at once to get into the plane. At intervals, she would lose control of herself and begin to shake and shiver, and once or twice a cunning, suspicious expression passed over her face and she drew back. I am sure she was on the verge of madness and that her will, which normally must have been strong, leaned upon Hermann's for support because it was the only support which offered itself. It is very different with me. With nervous or drunken people, and people

mentally deranged, whatever I say seems to make them hostile and quarrelsome.

The motor began to roar and Hermann taxied across the plain behind Landres and left the ground. He knew the country as well by night as by day, having flown in the dark and the dusk countless times over the same terrain. The moon began to break through the clouds, adding to our already insurmountable difficulties, and the last I saw of them was a glint upon the wings of the plane as it turned toward the east and the north. Hermann told me afterwards that Alberta lapsed into a semi-conscious state as soon as he had seated her in the plane, and leaned inertly against his shoulder until they had landed a mile east of Neuwied, where he lived.

The rest of us had a hard time. All the roads were being shelled and before we could get out of Nouart, the next afternoon, the first American troops had reached the outskirts of the town. This time we had to leave without packs, or even water in our canteens. Then as soon as we were comparatively safe I was arrested; and the armistice was signed while I was in the guardhouse. Hermann, because of his record, got an almost immediate discharge and on November fifteenth he turned in his plane, bought a suit of civilian clothes at Elberfeld, where he was discharged, threw his uniform into a



drain and walked to Neuwied. He found his mother sitting by the bedside of the American woman, trying to wake her up in order to feed her a few spoonfuls of soup. . . . The soup was pretty thin in those days, Weller added.

There are few spots lovelier than Neuwied, he went on. It lies on the slopes of two hills, turned to face one another, on the east bank of the Rhine a few miles downstream from Coblenz. And at that season, when the frost has turned the leaves dark in the vineyards and the grasses are silver and brown, it is almost more soothing than in spring. Before the war, Hermann had bought a large tract of land just outside the village and had started a tree nursery. He had decided to raise trees and to study them, and had planted all sorts of exotic shrubs and shade trees and vines which he believed would thrive in that climate. Most of them had died during the war, but many had survived; and even as he was walking home, he watched his long trousers flap against his legs all the way and thought about the trees. His mother, a large, firm-shouldered Rhineland woman with white hair and a low voice which is very positive at times, and his younger sister Frieda lived with him.

Hermann entered the house, kissed his mother and sat down without a word, his cap still in his hand, and his eyes wandering from the face of

Alberta to the window. His mother waited quietly, growing the least bit more aloof as the minutes went by, and then asked with an anxiety she could not quite conceal:

"Hermann, who is this woman?"

"An American, mother," he said. He wanted to explain everything to her, but at the moment the whole thing appeared so complicated, so frightfully involved with persons and places which seemed to have passed from his mind that he could not attempt it. He was tired, and didn't want to talk. His mother sat there expectantly, but he could not go on.

"I'll tell you all about her another time," he said, and this time the expression on her face showed she was hurt.

"Very well," she replied.

Whether she had misunderstood the situation as it was then, or had divined what it would lead to, I cannot say, Weller remarked. Frau Lutten-schlager is a strong-minded woman and so fond of Hermann that she can see nothing else in the world at times. It made matters rather worse at that moment when Alberta, hearing and remembering Hermann's voice, opened her eyes and obediently swallowed the soup which he offered to her. Frieda came running in and waited to be kissed until the feeding was over. Although she had always been

delighted in favor of Hermann, Frieda worshiped him and had already grown fervently attached to Alberta, who lay with her eyes closed day and night and whose skin had grown pale and almost transparent.

The first few days, Hermann wandered idly from the river bank to the nursery on the plain to the east, doing nothing and saying little to any one. The Rhine steamers had been commandeered and soon began plying between Köln and Coblenz loaded with troops. Hermann noticed at once the soldiers were Americans, and remembered that according to the terms of the armistice the Coblenz bridgehead was to be occupied by United States troops. He was glad, since he had always preferred the Americans or the English to the French, and because he thought that when Alberta was well enough to think clearly, she could easily join her countrymen at Coblenz and be transported home. Since he was aware of his mother's anxiety, he even suggested this to her and at once she became kindly and solicitous, spending the major part of her time in caring for the sick girl.

Each day, however, Hermann found it more difficult to bear the sudden cessation of excitement. It began to rain, and the drizzle kept up for weeks. He had been accustomed for four years to spending several hours in the air each day, his nerves were

still at the tension necessary for that, and nothing at all happened. The days were drab, the nights unnaturally quiet.

As soon as Alberta began to improve, she would talk incoherently in English, and he had to strain all his faculties in order to understand a phrase now and then and try to reassure her. There was only one doctor in Neuwied, and Hermann had no confidence at all in him. He hesitated to call in a man from Coblenz for fear the story that he had an American woman in the house would spread and be misinterpreted and perhaps make trouble for both of them. So he tried to get her harassed spirit into control. It eased his own mind to occupy himself with this problem, which he came to grasp more fully as time went on. In the meantime, he had cautioned his mother and Frieda to say nothing about Alberta's nationality, and they let it be understood throughout the village that she was a shell-shocked nurse from some other part of Germany.

## v

THE longer Hermann tried to rest, the more nervous he became, Weller said. He caught himself speaking sharply to his mother and sister and walking far out of his way to avoid saying "Good morning" to an old neighbor. The stillness made his ears roar and on dull days when the clouds seemed ready

at any time to dissolve into mist he would have sharp pains in his forehead and his eyes would ache. What saved me from such a reaction, I believe, was my school routine. I came home to Johanna (he looked at her affectionately), who kept things so orderly at home that I had only to reach out and take what was brought to me; and every day the same shaved heads and round faces would appear before me, at the exact hour, the bells would ring, the whistles blow at noon and at ten o'clock each night Johanna would say, "It's time for bed, now, Edmund," and soon I would be asleep. It would have been harder if I had been flying.

Now and then I wrote Hermann and he would reply within a few days, often telling me of Alberta. He did not know her last name. Neither she nor he showed any great improvement until one day he hit upon the plan of teaching her German, simply, by ear, as if she were a child. He stopped speaking English to her and patiently mentioned the objects or described the actions she could see until she began repeating words after him and soon could express direct ideas. The deeper she was able to sink into German, the safer she seemed to feel, and she began to eat and to sit up, and then Frieda, who was delighted to be able at last to say a word or two to the strange woman, cut and made over some clothes Frau Luttenschlager had worn when she

was slender, and one day they induced Alberta to dress and sit by the window. The clothes were not elegant, but they fitted quite well and their old-fashionedness gave her a quiet, dignified air which made Hermann's mother more sympathetic than she had ever been. Hermann's promised explanation had never been made, for the longer he put it off the more difficult it appeared to him, but Frau Luttenschlager noticed how he had improved in spirits since he had begun Alberta's German lessons, and the mother was quite astonished to hear the foreign girl imitating so well Hermann's pure Hanoverian enunciation he had learned from his father.

Hermann had hidden away the uniform which Alberta had worn and was careful not to mention the presence of American troops at Coblenz,—in fact, he never said a word which suggested the war. Within a few weeks, she had made enough progress to plunge herself earnestly into the study of the language, and began to read primers and then more complicated books. When she did not understand the meaning of a word, Hermann would define it for her and often he would read aloud, some of the sentimental poets he himself had never outgrown. One afternoon, late in the winter, after he had been walking for an hour among his bare, neglected trees and Frau Luttenschlager had taken



Frieda to Coblenz to hear the American band concert, Hermann as he approached the house heard the faint sound of the old square piano which had remained closed for months, and as he came nearer caught the words of "Die Krähe," Schubert's song about the raven. No music can ever be lovelier than Schubert, because it flows. You know "Die Krähe"? It starts with a low minor melody and soft accompaniment and the song comes stealing in from somewhere above, and when it is over the same notes of the beginning die out gradually and leave you just as you were, only shaken and more quiet.

"That is beautiful," Hermann said, when she had finished. He surmised her voice had been trained, and that she had learned the German words in other years, but he did not let her suspect he ever thought of her past and, indeed, he had gotten to the point where he clung to the present himself and tried to forget everything that had happened and to shut out all conjectures about the future. "Would you sing 'Auf dem Wassern zu Singen'?" Her fingers were weak and unruly, but they seemed to feel for the accompaniment from habit, and she sang the song which was meant to float over the surface of the water, at night. It was long and she began to get a bit tired, so he coaxed her back to her chair by the window and read to her until his mother returned.

That night he could not sleep. She was getting well. Soon she would be able to go out of doors and would have to be told about the Americans at Coblenz. Soldiers passed on the Rhine boats often, but the most direct way from the house to the river bank brought one a quarter of a mile above the town landing, at a point where the channel was close to the opposite bank. Both the British and the Belgians wore khaki and at that distance she might not recognize the uniform, but frequently soldiers on leave visited Neuwied and he did not dare risk the shock of having her meet one of them without warning. It was not a loss of memory from which she suffered. That would have been kind. It was an exaggeration of all the horrors of memory, making the past a nightmare into which she would rather die than reënter. We all felt that, to a lesser degree. He wanted her new environment to be like a pleasant dream to her.

It had had a profound effect on him, seeing her come to life like a plant refreshed by water, and it frightened him to realize how much she depended upon him. What frightened him more was the thought that she might soon go away. Neuwied, without her, would be like an old stage setting, covered with mold and peopled with actors' ghosts. The political turmoil of all the countries surrounding, the economic abyss over which Germany was

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hanging, the plague of world hatred and individual rapacity which Neuwied's hills had shut out temporarily from him and his household lurked in the air on every side to swamp him. Little by little she had entered into his blood. It was something more poignant than love. It was desperation, concentrated and distilled, and even before he had acknowledged it, it had made him so wary that he had thrown his mother off her guard and had become to Alberta, even before she could talk coherently, an almost impersonal voice which she might obey without question or apprehension. She had stolen into him so completely that there seemed to be no possibility of his having affected her. At least, that did not occur to him. He saw no way to hold her, no way even to shield her for long, and so he passed the night wide awake, unable to stir in bed for fear of disturbing Alberta, since he slept in the next room, with the door open, and when she had bad dreams or was restless, he would speak to her from the doorway and she would go to sleep.

It is surely true that physical affinities exist which are hard to account for. For I remember that in that stone-paved room at Landres, where that most horrible scene occurred, Hermann could get an almost sympathetic response from her when she would not answer the colonel or me.

Spring came early that year, and if Hermann had been trying to provide a dream in which Alberta might live, Nature suddenly began to co-operate with all her might. Have you ever seen the Rhineland in the spring? All the rugs and barges, newly painted and with engines oiled to swirl against the current, appear like the birds, from Holland, Scandinavia, England, everywhere. New leaves uncurl upon the terraced vineyards which stretch from the river banks to the tops of the hills, whose smoothness is broken by the ruins of medieval castles and the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein. The sun is strong while the air is still cool, and almost as you watch it, the brown grass is tinged with green and stippled with white and yellow flowers. The farmers shout to their horses, the taverns open their doors and men drink May wine sitting upon the sills and waiting for the moon to rise above the summit. The valley is so narrow in places that music and voices can be heard from one side to the other and at night all is so still, except for the river bells and the laughter, that the drone of the June bugs flying around the lamps and bumping one another sounds almost ominous. I know of no other place where the urge of the sun to the earth is so eloquent and so contagious.

One afternoon in April, Hermann walked with Alberta to the river bank and sat beside her, watch-



ing the tugs go by. It was at an hour when there would be no passenger boats, and they saw no one except the men and women hanging clothes upon the barges and a few boys fishing for carp. Always they spoke in German, and while her vocabulary was not large, she was able to converse without difficulty and each day more fluently. It was that day he told her about his trees, and when Hermann is on the subject of trees, he becomes another being. There were no unpleasant reminders. The air was fragrant and the sunshine benevolent. In an almost childish way, she leaned close to him and vibrated with his words.

And the touch of her shoulder against his own revived his feeble desire to enter life once more. The trees of which he spoke were in need of his care. He should have ordered cartloads of younger trees to set out in the spring sun. As he talked to her, another current in his mind was swirling around the rocks of practical obstacles. He had saved nearly all of his pay during the four years of war, for his mother's and his sister's hardships had resulted from the scarcity of certain products rather than from poverty. By the time his new shrubs and trees were ready for the market, the Rhineland would be left in peace again, men everywhere would have gone back to their old pursuits, and there would be people in Germany, France,

even across the sea, who would want to beautify their property with the rare trees he had nursed through their dangerous youth. His plans began to form. Alberta sat with her hands clasped in front of her knees, eyes half closed, listening and drinking in the warmth and fragrance. Frieda, coming down from the house, saw them sitting there and turned back to another road.

Once a man feels himself outside the barriers of life, it is difficult for him to turn the latch and enter. It seems to him as if his entrance were conspicuous and that all those on the inside were looking at him contemptuously. Once he has blended himself with the crowd, however, he is greatly relieved to be back. The next day, since she had no ill effects from her first walk, Hermann took Alberta to the neglected nursery, where some of the Japanese shrubs and a flowering chestnut had burst their buds and had commenced to pour out rose colored petals, crinkled from their long confinement. At once he went to work, for he should have started earlier in the season, clipping off twigs here and there, covering roots, sawing off limbs and bandaging the wounds. She followed him from tree to tree, picking up implements for him, examining the boughs he had lopped off, gathering flowers which showed timidly through the grasses and once, when he turned suddenly, he saw her chinning her-



self on a low limb. She got up once, but the second time her arms began to tremble and she had to let go. Her strength was returning, and during the days which followed, Hermann was astonished at her strong and supple body. The women he had known had been strong, for lifting or working in the fields, but they were not athletic.

He sent to Magdeburg for a cartload of young trees and hired one of the villagers to help him transplant them. The money he had saved was in a bank at Elberfeld, and when he drew out enough for his first payment, he found the marks were worth less than half their former value. This bewildered him, for he had read no newspapers and talked with no one who was aware of what was going on. He and his mother had a long talk that night, after Alberta had gone to bed, but he convinced Frau Luttenschlager that things would right themselves by the time he had a crop ready to sell. Since Alberta and he had begun to mend, he believed the whole world was reviving and the spring helped make it appear so.

Coblenz, at the time, was in a state of prosperity, in so far as workmen or shopkeepers were concerned. The American soldiers were handsomely paid and spent every cent as fast as they got it. I remember one old waiter at the Fürstenhof who got drunk for the first time in his life, and he was

seventy, on the first American pay day. The soldiers would offer him a glass of schnapps each time they ordered a round, and he was afraid to refuse for fear of appearing unfriendly. In the middle of the afternoon, he collapsed and had to be carried home. At Köln, the situation was much the same, to a lesser degree, for the British did not have so much money to spend and were a bit more careful with what they had. Of course, the soldiers were ordered not to fraternize with the Germans, but before three days were up, American privates and non-coms were strolling under the archway and up the river bank through the beautiful park where General Dawes had his quarters, and the people all liked the soldiers because they were so young and care-free and generous. But the professional men and those with small incomes from investments had already begun to be pinched. Here in Essen, the Krupp works kept everybody busy and the coal mines were producing almost as much as they did before the war. I, myself, thought Germany was going to recover.

After a day or two, Hermann's helper was offered a steady job in Coblenz, and Alberta, who overheard it when he told Hermann, begged him to let her do the work. She knew the name of every shrub, in German and Latin, and the few days in the sun and air had tanned her face and her arms



and restored her appetite. The healthier she looked, the more Hermann worried, because he could not put off any longer telling her about the American occupation and bringing up the subjects they had so far avoided. At times he believed she had actually forgotten what had taken place; then a furtive fear would reflect itself in her eyes and she would lose the thread of the conversation and be uneasy for minutes afterward. Hermann let her help him with the work, and Frau Luttenschlager, who came occasionally to the nursery to watch, would often find Alberta in the topmost branches of a full-grown tree, or digging holes with a spade, ignoring her blistered hands. Frau Luttenschlager would shake her head. Alberta was a strange, exotic creature to her, as far removed from the old-school German idea of a woman as could be imagined. Silently Hermann's mother was waiting for the day when Alberta should leave Neuwied, for she was anxious for her son to marry; already he had passed the age when it is best for Germans to marry, and she was always afraid there would be some entanglement with the American which would upset the rhythm of their lives. She was blind to what was happening principally because she was so loath to acknowledge it. For a woman to wear trousers and swing herself from branch to branch of a tree by her arms, unless she was a professional acrobat, was

shocking to Hermann's mother. She could have understood an ordinary liaison, and for Hermann's sake would have countenanced it. What actually was developing, she did not know, but she was uncompromisingly hostile to it.

After the young trees had been planted and stood in slim rows upon the high plain, a tag flapping from each trunk, Hermann made up his mind to tell Alberta of the proximity of her countrymen.

Seated on the river bank, one Sunday afternoon, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, tried to control his hands which were shivering, and said abruptly:

"Alberta, you know that the war is over."

She sat up rigidly, her eyes fixed, and he went on, in a panic.

"You know Germany was beaten and that the Allies are on both banks of the Rhine." He pointed to the river.

"I thought I ought to tell you that at Coblenz, just above us, the Americans are in charge, and that if, at any time, you wish to join them or even to see them, you may do so."

All the blood left her face, which turned yellow beneath the tan. She stood erect, her teeth chattering, and started to walk toward the house, going faster and faster and finally breaking into a run. Hermann stood where he was, unable to de-

cide whether or not he should follow her, then after a moment started to run also; but she was out of sight.

VI

OUR dinner had long been finished and cleared away. Johanna Weller, unable to follow what her husband had been saying, had almost been put to sleep by the hearty meal and the rise and fall of his voice. In order not to tire her, I suggested taking them home and sent the waiter out for the single taxi which had waited in vain so many days before my hotel. The waiter reported that the taxi driver had gone to bed.

Weller was eager to go on with his story, and persuaded me to come home with them so that he and I might sit in his study as long as we liked. The waiter brought the bill, with a bewildered look upon his face, and when I handed him bank notes amounting to nearly two million marks he stared at them wearily and tried to make change. Already on the bills of fare the last five ciphers to the right were left off, by common consent, so that the figure 2 meant 200,000.

After a ride on the last street car, during which we kept silent because of the rumbling of the wheels and the rattling of the windows, we mounted to the Weller flat, relieved the drowsy neighbor of

the care of the children, and Johanna excused herself and went to bed. For the rest of the night, Weller and I sat in large easy-chairs, smoking pipes, he talking and I listening, until at last the sound of a French bugle came faintly from the barracks and, astonished, we raised the window shades and turned out the light.

. . . When Hermann reached the house, Weller went on, Alberta was nowhere to be found. He searched upstairs and down, then decided she had gone on to the orchard or the nursery. He hurried to the top of the hill, where he could see for several miles over the plateau, but there was no sign of her. Returning to the house, he asked his mother if she had seen her, but Frau Luttschlager had been asleep in her chair by the window and had noticed nothing.

He could not believe that Alberta had gone toward Coblenz, for her actions and expression had suggested terror at the mention of the Americans, but he borrowed a bicycle from a neighbor and rode up the east bank, inquiring of all whom he met if they had seen a woman pass that way. No one could give him any information. Darkness fell, and he did not dare call upon the police for help, since he had never reported that Alberta was in his house. Frieda had gone all through the town,

without finding a clew, and Frau Luttenschlager, although relieved at the thought that the girl might have left them, was so much exercised by Hermann's anxiety that she began to wish Alberta back and to pace the floor distractedly.

After a frantic search along the river bank, where he called Alberta's name futilely across the water, Hermann came back to the house and entered the living room, where his mother was waiting for him. As he was standing there, cap in hand, his eyes cast down, he saw the corner of Alberta's tan skirt protruding from underneath the divan. Quickly he got down on his hands and knees and saw she was lying there full length. He moved the divan, and found she was awake and conscious, with a guilty expression, almost a fearful one, on her face, like a child that has been caught in some grave misdeed. She lay still, looking at him, but did not stir, and when he lifted her upon the divan she closed her eyes and reverted to the half-stupor in which she had remained for weeks after he had brought her to Neuwied.

"Mother, will you leave us alone for a little while?" Hermann asked, and Frau Luttenschlager left the room and shut the door. In speaking to Alberta this time he was brutally direct.

"I want you to wake up and pay attention,

Alberta," he said. "You know that the war is over, don't you? . . . Answer me!"

"Yes," she said, brought out of her stupor by his tone.

"And you remember what I said about the Americans at Coblenz. You may meet one at any time, and you had best be prepared for it," he continued.

She tried to sustain the recurring shock of this but could not. Her forehead was damp, her lips bloodless. She was not yet strong enough. Instantly he became tender, taking her head in his hands.

"I told you that you were free to go," he said. "Do I have to say, dear girl, that I pray that you will stay? What is better than the Rhineland? You speak German. You are dressed in German clothes. Your skin and your eyes are those of a Saxon woman. In the evening you sing Schubert songs. I did not say what I said to worry you, but to save you from a shock more severe."

"You have been very good to me," she said, and slowly began to cry.

"I will never mention the war again," he continued. "No one in Neuwied knows who you are. You are perfectly safe with us. Now, will you promise not to go away?"

"I have nowhere to go," she replied, and finding the words ungracious as she heard them she

seized his hand and kissed it. "I don't want to leave you," she added, quickly.

They talked about their work in the orchard,—the plants which were due to bloom, a test he had promised to make in a neighbor's vineyard, and when it was late, he stepped outside until she was in bed, then tiptoed back and held his hand lightly upon her forehead until she went sound asleep. Hermann was so intoxicated by her first real response to him that he could not close his eyes. There was still a light in his mother's room, so he tapped lightly and entered. Frau Luttschlager was sitting by the window in a dressing gown, much perturbed. Hermann, in his elation, failed to notice her displeasure.

"Alberta has promised to stay with us," he said. "I have told her about the Americans at Coblenz."

She turned on him indignantly.

"What will all this lead to?" she asked. "You have a brilliant future, if you do just one thing sensibly. You can marry any girl in Germany. You are a hero, an idol in Berlin and Munich and Stuttgart, everywhere. You want to raise trees, which takes knowledge, land, and capital. You have knowledge and land. Your wife must bring you capital."

"You do not read the papers, Hermann, my boy," she went on. "You do not know what is in

store for us, with our money dwindling every day.

"And what would you do with a foreign wife? You think now she would be picturesque, and little by little you would find that the fundamental things on which men and women must agree are understood differently by her. I have seen too many mixed marriages in Alsace and Lorraine.

"Besides, this woman is crazy. You know it and I know it. Send her back where she belongs before it is too late. I heard you in her bedroom."

If his mother had misunderstood him less completely, Hermann would have been able to answer her. He tried to say that he did not care for money, that Alberta was suffering from wounded nerves, just as Colonel Müller and many sane, strong men were suffering, and that he felt she was not a foreigner, but really of German origin, like thousands in America. Finally he became exasperated and said that he would not remain one day in Neuwied without her.

The possibility of his leaving sobered Frau Luttschlager, who replied with hurt dignity that she would not interfere again in his affairs. Of course the result of the interview was to drive Hermann closer to Alberta. He avoided the house as much as possible, taking Alberta to the hills or the river on Sundays and the evenings when she was too tired to sing. Each day they worked to-

gether long hours in the nursery, and in the vegetable garden, and as meat grew scarce, because of the high prices the Americans at Coblenz were willing to pay, he taught her to fish for carp to help supply the table.

What brought their increasing poverty most forcibly to their attention was the necessity to let Frieda go to work as a waitress in Coblenz. One of the neighbor girls had already been employed by a hotel in which several American officers and non-coms dined and made enough in tips to keep her family from hunger. The Luttenschlagers ate meat but once a week and to buy even a cotton handkerchief was out of the question. Frieda first persuaded Hermann, who helped convince his mother, although Frieda had never spent a night away from home. He would have tried to get work had he been trained for anything which was then profitable. . . .

And then (Weller blushed and I looked away) the news came that Germany was not paying fast enough and that the Ruhr was to be taken away.

VII

YOU have seen enough to realize what must have happened when our currency fell so low there was no hope of redeeming it and the basis of our industrial life was paralyzed. It was worse here in

Essen because the workmen and miners were always getting into brawls with the French soldiers and then there would be reprisals and deportations and more hard feeling. It is terrible to live in a city where violence and hatred are in the air, pressing upon one from all sides, like the atmosphere before a thunderstorm.

The Lutten-schlagers, far up the Rhine, were safe from violence, but they had nothing but Frieda's wages which each morning were half what they had been the night before. Every cent had to be spent the day it was earned, and the Coblenz shopkeepers began hiding away their goods because any commodity was safer to hold than the marks. Alberta could not help feeling that she was a burden upon them and yet she knew that Hermann would be lost without her. She tried to help Frau Lutten-schlager with the housework and was chagrined because she was so awkward about it. Also she had begun to shrink from Frau Lutten-schlager's hostility to her. Hermann realized this and his greatest fear was that she should take offense and leave them. The autumn came and the leaves turned yellow and dropped from the shrubs and trees. The seasonal rains poured down. And the discord between Hermann and his mother increased. The river was swollen and too muddy for fishing, the vegetables, except for those which could be

stored, were no longer available. Frieda was paid each evening, and Hermann at last was obliged to go to Coblenz every night, take the money she had earned during the day and rush to the stores early in the morning, before the prices were raised to meet the new exchange figure. This was humiliating to him. He brooded about his own inability to get money and by going so often to the city was inflamed constantly by the talk he heard there.

It was Alberta's turn to comfort him, and she did so with such tenderness that he was astonished by the warmth of her nature. Frau Luttsenschlager's slights she pretended not to notice. She tried to hide her own depression and to please him with her progress in German and her knowledge of the trees. When he was especially downcast, she would sing for hours to him. Yet she knew the moment he left her presence his melancholy returned.

You do not know how many men went crazy or took their own lives. The old schoolmaster at Neuwied was found hanging from a beam in the shed behind the schoolhouse. The bookkeeper in the grocery store, bewildered by the figures running into millions and billions, overflowing the columns he had kept so patiently all his life, set fire to his books and to all the money in the store and was taken to the madhouse.

In the middle of that first terrible winter,

Hermann received a letter from one of his former flying comrades in Berlin. In connection with the reparations, a survey of our resources was being made and Major Jungblut offered Hermann a position in charge of the inventory of the forests and orchards. The salary, the major explained, would be adjusted weekly in proportion to the value of the mark. Frau Luttsenschlager, hungry and tired, wept with joy when he gave her the letter to read, but Hermann left the house and went walking alone in the hills for hours. He was thinking of Alberta.

He did not tell Alberta until evening but he knew he would have to go. A drizzling rain was falling. He could not bear to talk to her in the house, so they wrapped themselves up well and walked through the mud along the river bank. Before he could bring himself to tell her what was on his mind, the rain came down in torrents and they had to take refuge in the shelter across from the railroad station. Sitting there in that bleak little shed with curtains of rain shutting them off on all sides, he read the major's letter and doggedly, as if his last strength was ebbing, let his head sink down into her lap. Years of struggle in the maelstrom of war, months of sinking through the stagnant pools of peace. He was beaten and exhausted and sobbed upon her knees. Instantly she sensed

his fear. It was she who had meant new life for him. It was he who had been torn open to receive her. There was no longer any dissimulation. Surcharged with love and sympathy she smothered his head in her arms and poured her strength into his tired body.

"Surely, my darling, you know that what is left of me belongs to you. You cannot doubt it."

She had come to associate him so definitely with the German language that even in her agitation she spoke of her love in German, straining her body against him. He was dazed and overcome by her outburst. It was he who had been stifling for months an open declaration of his love, and when the moment came he had only to receive her own.

All at once his muscles swelled to break her embrace and he sunk his convulsive fingers into the flesh of her shoulders, breathing her hair, draining the breath from her lips, clasping her knees and her thighs. It was a struggle of opposing passions. He knew he must subdue her. Slowly they came to themselves and timidly huddled together, throwing back their heads as if grateful for the torrent of rain. When finally they returned to the house she clung to him so firmly on the threshold of her room that he could not mistake her meaning; but the thought of his mother near by held him back. What is the greater pity, the implica-

tion of the poison pills rankled faintly in his mind, in his overwrought condition. He knew he ought to go on, to the end, that very night, but his nerves were unequal to the strain.

"We can wait," he said. "We have years before us."

A few days later he left Neuwied for Berlin. He wrote Alberta every day, but our mails were so confused that letters were lost or delayed more often than not and he was obliged to travel so much that he seldom heard from her. Still, he did not once think of losing her. In his despondent moods he wondered just how far his nerves had been damaged and what sort of life companion he would make. Then, as things grew worse with Germany he was sometimes afraid it was a dead land and that young people there had been born into slavery, and at such moments he would consider whether they both should go away, to Asia, or South America. Besides, he dreaded living with his mother, as he must do if he stayed in the Rhineland.

Alberta had not foreseen how difficult it would be to live with Hermann away. She tried to keep up her studies, to watch the trees and to make herself helpful to Frau Lutten-schlager; but in the early spring the Americans decided to leave the Rhineland and all the bitterness Frau Lutten-schlager had been suppressing broke out when the

French flag was hoisted over Ehrenbreitstein and she was stopped by a sentry on the way to the village where she had been born and forbidden to go there.

"America has betrayed us," she said to Alberta, who turned pale and could find nothing to say.

Not long after the Americans went out of Coblenz, Frieda left her job, since the French soldiers were paid so little they could not afford to tip and the mark had reached a figure where her week's wages would scarcely buy a meal. Hermann sent them money by the train conductors, and with the summer coming on and the vegetables and fish to be had once more, their situation was still bearable. Frieda was with Alberta constantly and one day showed her a snapshot of an American sergeant and confessed she was engaged to him.

"I am afraid to tell mamma," Frieda said. "She hates foreigners so." Feeling Alberta wince, she threw her arms around her and added: "Please don't feel badly. You know I don't mean you."

The soldier in the picture had his cap just a bit too far on one side and his expression was care-free in the extreme. I have noticed that many of our girls are attracted by that quality which contrasts with our earnestness.

"He is coming back for me next year," Frieda

continued. "Here is his address, and you must help me write to him because he doesn't know a word of German."

The address was George Roederer, St. Louis, Missouri.

"But St. Louis is six times bigger than Köln," Alberta started to say. At once she was uneasy. Her uneasiness grew day by day as she watched Frieda and thought she was growing pale and distraught.

Weller paused to light his pipe, and remained silent a moment before he said:

It was not until weeks after Alberta had disappeared that Hermann learned by what means she got out of Neuwied and the military zone.

(I could not conceal my dismay when it became apparent to me that she had dropped from sight once more.)

Hermann, he continued, had not flown since the day of the Armistice. When it became necessary to make a long trip in connection with his work on the forest inventory, they gave him an old biplane which had been used for instruction purposes, probably the safest kind of machine ever devised, and he had barely left the ground on his first trial of it before he, one of the greatest aces, became bewildered somehow, and crashed. In the hospital they brought him a letter from home


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which caused him to get up from his bed, with all the doctors and nurses protesting around him, put on his clothes and start for Neuwied.

Not long after Frieda had told Alberta about the American sergeant she had come to her, crying, one day, and confided that she was ill. Alberta guessed instantly what was the matter. From that moment, her fears and furtive impulses returned. She fought with herself to keep from hiding or from remaining in bed, and each time Frau Lutenschlager came into the room Alberta's head would begin to grow dizzy. She could not bear to tell Frieda there was no chance of her American returning and she knew that eventually she must be the one to strike the blow to Hermann and to his mother. In the midst of whatever she tried to do, she would feel her face flushing with shame. The awakening of her own love was so vivid in her mind that she could not fight off a feeling of disgust at the reminder that what had seemed rare and sacred to her was a casual affair to any common soldier.

"Frieda was pregnant?" I asked. It was a stupid question but the fact was so cruel that I resisted believing it until he repeated it, point-blank.

In some ways, he said, a friendly occupation is worse than a hostile one.

When Alberta could keep silent no longer, she

wrote a letter to Hermann, but he had made a quick change of address and was hurt before it reached him. Our post office used to be reliable, but at that time all the mail clerks from the districts we had lost were still on the pay roll and each post office had too many men.

As the days passed and Alberta heard nothing from Hermann, she tried to get up her courage to tell Frau Luttenschlager; and one afternoon, with her arm over Frieda's shoulders, she faced Hermann's mother resolutely and told her what had happened. Because Alberta was there before her, shielding the younger girl, Frau Luttenschlager's torrent of rage was directed to her, and to her countrymen. All the things Frau Luttenschlager had held back because of Hermann came out, in her anger, until Alberta, white and trembling, was driven from the house. Frieda lay on the divan, sobbing, for her mother had struck her sharply across the face.

After Hermann returned, a peasant told him he had taken Alberta across the line into what now is France, hidden in a load of hay. For this service she had given him her gold locket. This and the aluminum wrist watch she had carried were the only articles of value she had.

The letters she had written in his name to St. Louis, addressed to George Roederer, were re-

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turned eventually to Neuwied and her appeal to the St. Louis chief of police, although it brought a reply, did not result in the man's being located. So with all the money Hermann could borrow Frieda was married off quickly to the son of the town grocer, who had shot himself, and only lately she has begun to visit her mother's house again. Hermann came to me, for a week, and we tried to help him but the dreariness of Essen drove him to work again. Now he spends his days morosely walking up and down between his rows of trees and eating without a word the meals his mother serves him. I am afraid for Hermann, Weller said sadly.



PART V



*The Amazon*





UPON returning to my hotel from Weller's apartment, after a breakfast with butter which I am afraid they could not afford, I found a cablegram had been slipped under my door.

"PARIS STUFF FINE COLOGNE PROGERMAN OLD MAN WANTS FRENCH AUGLE."

The "French augle" had me stopped for a moment, in my drowsy state, but soon I realized that it meant "French angle," and I remembered that the owner of the paper was a violent partisan of Poincaré, spent much time in Paris, and for some time his wife had been expecting him to be made a member of the Legion of Honor. I swore perfunctorily to myself, as every newspaperman does at such moments, so often that it becomes almost an unconscious gesture like that of a priest genuflecting as he scratches his nose. My Cologne dispatch had been based upon conversation with the American consul there and I had visions of all my stuff about the dying babies going into the waste-basket; but I was in no position to carry on an argument with the office, so I set about getting what they wanted. The best way to get the French

angle of the Ruhr situation, outside of the press bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Paris, it seemed to me, was to interview if I could the French general in charge of the Ruhr area. I found out what his name was and where his headquarters were situated, wrote a letter in copy-book French asking for an appointment with him, took the letter to a French sergeant in order that he might throw in a few accents where they belonged, and then went to bed, telling the clerk to have me called only when or if a reply to my letter arrived. Promptly at noon the clerk himself came down the long corridor with a dispatch the general's orderly had brought. The clerk waited fearfully outside the door as I read the message, which accorded me an interview at four o'clock that afternoon.

At half past three, I climbed into the battered taxi which stood in the square and rode eastward, past the station and out to the group of buildings two or three miles beyond the city limits, which previously had served for the local garrison. There were surprisingly few formalities, and no one even asked for my papers. A rather listless orderly showed my letter to a sergeant-major whose voice I heard from an inner room. The sergeant-major telephoned upstairs and in two minutes the orderly led me up one winding flight of stone stairs and into a rather dim room where,

behind a desk, alone, sat General Dussot. He rose courteously and shook hands with me, inviting me to sit down.

From the window, the vista was black and discouraging and I saw at once that the general was in a disconsolate mood. He was a tall, handsome man, not more than fifty-five years old, with dark hair and a dark, well-trimmed mustache. He spoke quietly and deliberately and apparently was not at all familiar with news values. Since the bridge had been blown up a few days before I arrived in the Ruhr, there had been no outstanding acts of violence and no extra police measures, so General Dussot thought I had come a long way for nothing and, assuming perhaps that the interview was over, began to chat frankly with me on the general situation, which to him was a great bore. I guessed by the undertones of his remarks that he was not in political sympathy with the Premier and that he wanted to be back in France as soon as possible. He looked like a Royalist.

"Even though the miners are now at work," he said, "the mines are not producing anything like the quantity of coal they yielded before the occupation. It is the same with the Krupp works, and because iron and coal are the bases of all industry, the textiles suffer and food production is more difficult.

“As a matter of fact, we seem to have lost by coming here, for the only way the Germans can pay for the damage they did is by making and selling goods, and I am afraid we have prevented that very thing. Now they are bankrupt. It may be that the Ruhr industries can be brought to their peak of production under our supervision, but I doubt it.”

He smiled, and I tried to look sympathetic and unconcerned. “No,” he added, “as an economic move, the occupation cannot be called a success, and if it is peace we want, it surely is not calculated to promote good feeling.”

I really felt ashamed of myself for letting him go on because I knew he had not the slightest idea of the import his words would have in print. He was such a courteous gentleman, so difficult to associate with the blunders and outrages of which I had been told by my Quaker friend and the German business men, that I had an impulse to warn him. What I did, to head off a pledge of secrecy, however, was to change the subject as if I were not interested in economics and politics. We talked for a while about Paris and the restaurants there. General Dussot's eyes grew animate and he told me of several little places in the market district I thought I knew so well, and when we said good-by he hoped we might meet in Paris sometime, where

interviews may be carried on in more pleasant surroundings. I have never felt more like Judas than I did when I shook his hand and left the room. His last words were to the effect that he was sorry he had no news to give me.

Years of newspaper work do not diminish one's capacity for enthusiasm when one stumbles upon a really big story. As I rode back to the hotel in the rope-shod taxi, a feeling of triumph took full possession of me. I was about to send an exclusive interview with the military ruler of the occupied district, the most important pronouncement upon the situation since the move was first contemplated. Paris was full of photographs of General Dussot, and I planned to wire one of the services there to mail one at once to Boston. I sketched out a letter to one of my newspaper friends there asking him to write a biographical sketch with emphasis upon the general's brilliant war record. I myself had statistics enough to compare German payments before and after the occupation. When I think now of my elation, I marvel at being capable of such an aberration, for after I had rushed a letter to Paris into the mails to be cabled at once and had spent the night writing a detailed follow story with which I took more pains than with anything I had ever written, as I was going to bed I remembered again that the boss was out for the Legion of Honor.

The story I had sent was more favorable to the Germans than anything that had been printed. Such a response to an order to present the French point of view would probably cost me my job. Sitting on the edge of the bed, I slowly grew angry, not on account of the attitude of the editors, which I knew was based upon their best understanding of world affairs, but because of the difficulty in promulgating authentic facts. Having felt the suffering around me so keenly, I was maddened by not being able to express it convincingly.

The fact that I had not slept the night before tended to make me more hasty than usual. I packed my suitcase, asked for my bill and quit my job by telegraph. That evening, after a journey by street car and afoot, I took a train from Elberfeld to Paris and fell asleep.

I awoke at dawn, just as the train was leaving Troyes, and for the remaining three hours of the journey I stood in the corridor watching the familiar landscape go by and tingling with that excitement which a return to France invariably inspires in me. The plains west of Troyes are rich and fertile, with scattered groves of trees, quaint villages huddled around their steeples, and occasional ravines upon the slopes of which the juniper bushes are tinged with pale blue berries. Long straight roads, with their double rows of poplars,





run parallel with the tracks or stretch obliquely across the wheat fields. Enormous haystacks stand in rolling meadows and the cattle turn their backs to the morning wind. Already the marks of the blighted land I had left were dimmed upon my brain. I opened the car window, to inhale the fragrance of clover and the morning smells of dew and earth which the smoke from the engine could not obliterate. Although I might be working the next day, worse luck, I was free that morning. I was being rushed toward the Gare de l'Est, where I might call a taxi and go wherever I liked. Paris would be stirring when I arrived, with its queer carts and workmen rushing into the corner cafés for a glass of white wine. The parks would be almost deserted at that hour, the place de la Concorde bare of traffic, the windows of the Opera would blink down the broad avenue at its feet like the eyes of a drowsy monster. People I had known would greet me. My feet would turn naturally into narrow alleys and around sharp corners. As the train reached the suburbs, my breath came faster and tears blurred my eyes. I was thinking of nothing in particular, but the sun had reached the level of the rooftops and was kindling windows at random among familiar towers. Once or twice I thought of Alberta Snyder, but I seemed to see her striding alone across a landscape in which

the sun had furbished windows like beacons, in a setting of roads lined with poplar trees and fields the tints of which had been subdued by cream-colored dust. Nothing could have depressed me then.

When the brakes began to grind and the train entered the station, my arms were trembling so that I nearly dropped my suitcase as I took it from the baggage rack. Disregarding the swarm of porters, I hurried out, hailed a taxi and rode slowly down the boulevard de Sébastopol toward my old hotel in the rue de la Huchette. The boulevard was clogged with tramcars, tricycles, trucks, pedestrians, newsvenders, market men, streetwalkers, and horse-drawn vehicles, welded together in a stream against which my chauffeur had to struggle. I was glad that it was so. I would not have hurried our progress for anything, for each dairy girl in a white apron or coal heaver with his blackened face I was saluting silently. If I had planned to return to Paris, my entrance could not have been so ecstatic, but here was the city around me, unchanged, getting under way with its accustomed rhythms and noises. I was happy to reflect, then, that my interview with General Dussot would never see the light of day and that the fine French gentleman who had received me so graciously should not be disgraced on my account. I promised

myself to dine that very night in one of the restaurants he had recommended.

I stopped the cab in the place Saint Michel, took out my small suitcase and typewriter, and walked down the narrow rue de la Huchette, through the head of which the sun was streaming from the direction of Notre Dame. In front of the Hôtel Normandie sat Mocha, the dog, who responded to my greeting. The thumbless garçon inside smiled and nodded. At my own hotel, near the corner, the proprietor was sitting alone behind the little zinc bar, watching a cat licking milk from a saucer, and waiting for the coffee to boil on the small gas burner behind him. His face lighted up as I entered and his fine Savoyard mustaches turned upward in a spontaneous gesture of welcome. His surprise seemed to refer to my long absence and not to the fact that I had come back that morning. My old room beneath the eaves was vacant and, once there, I stood at the high window for fully an hour, watching the light change upon the gargoyle roof of the cathedral, the tramps ambling to and fro in front of the enormous city hospital, the street traffic and the tugs drifting slowly down the river. Late in the afternoon, I dropped in at the office of the paper where I was known and asked the managing editor what the prospects were.

"I need a copy reader on the night side," he said.

"Give me an evening or two to look around," I said, and we agreed that I should come to work the following Monday.

With little difficulty I found the restaurant General Dussot had spoken of, and I ate there until every other customer had departed and the waiters showed signs of wanting to close. I sat for a few hours on the terrace of a boulevard café, letting the passing throng lead my eyes from left to right and back again according to the sounds or sudden bits of color, and when at two o'clock the waiters began to pile up the chairs and tables, I strolled down the rue Montmartre, which was clogged with market men and produce wagons, to the little café in which I had first seen John McCann.

The tramps were scratching themselves and starting their desultory search for odd jobs, butchers stood in the doorways with linen wrapped around their heads and bloodstains upon their aprons, piles of cauliflower, sacks of peas and string beans and boxes of fruit were stacked along the curbs and in the place before Saint Eustache were spread for a half-acre beneath the arc lights fragrant baskets of strawberries, lined with leaves.

The woman behind the cash drawer recognized me, the hurrying crowd at the bar paid no

attention, and my old seat was vacant. McCann came in occasionally, the waiter said, and always asked for me, but he had not put in an appearance for several nights, perhaps a month or two.

## II

NOT many days afterwards, I was sitting at the desk in the late afternoon, having agreed to work a few hours for one of my colleagues who had visitors on his hands. Only the columnist who sat glumly over his typewriter in one corner and the financial editor who was puttering with figures and fractions were in the city room at the time. I heard some one enter behind me, and noticed that the old man who guarded the doorway was following, bewilderedly. When I turned, I found myself face to face with McCann, who was much perturbed and seemed gladder to see me than I was to find him.

"Help me out, for God's sake," he said in a low voice. "My father-in-law thinks I work here."

Before I could get the meaning of his words thoroughly, a short, round-faced Frenchman well past middle age appeared in the doorway and, seeing that the guardian was about to stop him, I stepped out quickly and extended my hand. McCann hastily introduced me as his chief and asked permission in execrable French to show Monsieur Bertrand the office. I was too curious about the

whole situation to leave them, so I conducted them down the aisle at the left of which the stenographers, bookkeepers and advertising solicitors of the business department were occupied. Monsieur Bertrand was evidently unaccustomed to the rattle of typewriter keys and the glitter of adding machines, and was much awed.

McCann, relieved because of his unexpected turn of luck, began to warm up to the occasion, to respond to imaginary greetings from far corners of the huge room and, when we reached the far end, where the telephone switchboard was momentarily deserted, McCann picked up a date stamp like the ones he had seen at battalion headquarters and explained to his father-in-law how it worked.

In the meantime, I was observing Monsieur Bertrand and trying to make it appear that I esteemed McCann very highly as an employee. Monsieur Bertrand had drooping gray mustaches which he fingered nervously from time to time, and he was dressed with studied correctness, with a high collar and tiny butterfly bow tie such as I had seen in some of the faded photographs which had stood for years in the photographers' windows. His head was nearly bald and he mopped it freely with a handkerchief, since the exertion of climbing the stairs had thoroughly heated his blood. When we returned to the editorial room I



introduced him to the columnist, who was somewhat dazed, being in the throes of a hangover, and to the financial editor, explaining that the figures on the desk had come all the way from New York by cable. Both of them caught on that something unusual was happening and tried to do what was expected of them, with the result that McCann and his guest left the place after an elaborate ceremony of handshaking and farewells and even the old doorman, seeing with what deference the visitors were treated, gave them the French military salute as they descended the stairs. At the corner of the first landing, McCann turned his head, winked at me and made a motion which I took to mean that he would meet me at the usual place that night. I was not disappointed.

After a little preliminary talk, during which he tried to recall just how much he had told me the previous winter, he began his narrative with his experience in the base hospital at Souilly. Instead of sending him back to the 213th field signal battalion when he was well, the clerk had transferred him to the replacement camp at Saint Aignan and he had set out one morning early in November in the sidecar of a motorcycle, bound for Tours. He had no money, and had not been able to draw his pay. At Tours, after waiting two days for a train, he had met two privates he had known at Brest and

both of them were in funds. They slipped past the guard at the enclosure around the station at Tours and walked to the city, remained there until all the money was gone and then came back to sleep in the Red Cross hotel.

The trip to Saint Aignan took three days, in box cars, and upon arriving there they were herded into a shed and told to undress. While their clothes were being steamed, they were sent to the shower baths; but the hot water was not functioning and there were no more towels, so they emerged shivering and found their clothes in a soggy mass and much shrunken, and while they were looking at them in dismay; a medical sergeant had come along with a whitewash brush and painted their tapettes with creosote. Drafts blew through the cracks in the wooden building, non-coms were surly and domineering, and McCann had emerged from the delousing plant with a slip of paper in his hand assigning him to a casual company, and an overcoat which failed by more than an inch to reach across his chest. Soon after he found the barracks to which he had been assigned, McCann's company was called out for a roll call. He was standing absent-mindedly in line, squirming in his damp clothes, when a familiar voice asked curtly:

"How long have you been in the army? Don't you know enough to button your overcoat?"

And McCann turned his head to look into the freckled face of Captain Casey. The captain recognized him at the same instant and smiled.

"Report to my headquarters at once," he said. The company inspection was over in ten minutes and, when the captain returned to his tent, McCann sat with his legs crossed on the edge of the cot and told all he knew about the signal outfit. Captain Casey had finally gotten aboard a transport, from a southern camp, and had been assigned to temporary duty at Saint Aignan, where he was awaiting orders to go to the front. As McCann told him of the stable at Ville-sur-Cousances, the arrival of the telephone girls and the opening barrage in the Argonne, Captain Casey listened wistfully, his face flushed with chagrin.

"And I lost out on account of that trollop in Dorchester," he said.

Before the day was over, McCann had been assigned to duty as Casey's orderly and that evening he stood in the tent polishing leggings and telling stories of Laferté or Ligny or the woods behind Avocourt. Whenever McCann mentioned Major McGregor and the women, Captain Casey roared, remembering how bashful the major had been in company.

At the end of that week, the news of the false armistice reached Saint Aignan and brought on a

premature celebration, but there was but one café within walking distance of the camp and the mud was so deep and the duckboards so hazardous that the outburst was a dismal one, at best, and for Casey it meant bitter disappointment. He was not to see active service. Then came the real armistice three days later, and the captain, feeling no inclination to go back to the States without a single overseas stripe, arranged to get himself attached in some way to the Versailles conference and took McCann with him to Paris. The French exchange began to be more favorable to the Americans as the weeks went by and Casey was generous with McCann, with the result that the latter had money in his pocket nearly always, no work to do except to sweep, make the bed, press the uniforms and shine up the shoes, and the whole city in which to roam. There were Americans everywhere, so McCann had no difficulty in finding some one to talk with; and just as the conference was over, the races at Longchamps were resumed and the colored bootblack at the American Express gave McCann a tip on the first Grand Prix to be run since the declaration of war. Together they taxied to Longchamp, bought the most expensive seats in the *pesage* and placed their bets. The people, excited by the sight of the horses and the track so long denied them, were in an effervescent mood, the air was clear, and



somehow McCann felt lucky. The bootblack was very sure, and so McCann placed one thousand francs, nearly all he had saved since the armistice, on Tonnerre to win. Tonnerre was an outsider and paid fifty-two to one. McCann taxied back to Paris with fifty-two thousand francs in his pocket and had fifty thousand of it left the next morning. It was more money than he had ever had at one time.

Captain Casey told him that day that he was going to ask for his discharge in France, and McCann got to thinking of Dorchester and his street car for the first time in months. He remembered the daily grind, the painful awakening each morning, his mother's anxious waiting for his pay on Saturday night, the priest's pointed references to the saloons he frequented. And then it came over him that the American beer had been reduced to the consistency of dishwater. Without going through any elaborate mental processes, McCann knew that until he was forced to do so he would never return to such a life again. He asked Captain Casey to arrange his discharge abroad, saying that since he had been lucky enough to win so much money he wished to see something of Europe before leaving it.

After McCann had bought his French suit of purplish blue in which yellow threads were visible

at close range, with some misgivings about the trousers which accentuated his hips and waistline, and had given his uniform to the bootblack—who stood before the mirror in it often in his room and now and then ventured out upon the boulevards in khaki—he sat down at a sidewalk café at the corner of the rue Saint Martin and the boulevard. On the table he had selected was a large red-covered book which, upon examination, he believed was a railroad time table. In idly looking at the index while he was waiting for a waiter, he saw the words “Laferté-sur-Amance” and instantly had a longing to see the village once more. It seemed incredible that he was free to take a train as he pleased, that he had money enough so that he need not worry, and that there was no person in all France likely to caution him or to restrict in any way his actions.

The waiter knew a few words of English and McCann by that time understood a little French, so he made it clear to the waiter that he wanted to visit Laferté and that he had been quartered there during the war. The waiter showed him the way to the Gare de l'Est and impressed him with the fact that he must change at Langres.

McCann seldom spoke to me about his own emotions, but he recounted how after a four-hour ride he had boarded a little branch train and had found the countryside becoming gradually familiar,



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how he had been greeted by a French boy he had known as he had stepped through the gate at the Laferté station, which then was covered with climbing roses, and how in mounting the stony hill he had met the old woman who used to peddle papers; and that when he had stopped to greet her she had remained blank a moment and then had thrown up her arms in a gesture of recognition and had turned back to accompany him into the village square and tell all the neighbors that one of the Americans had come back to see them. In all he had told me, McCann had never shown so much feeling.

From one familiar corner of the village to another, he had passed, always welcomed heartily. He stood by the wall to smell the wine press, shook hands with Thérèse on the driveway before the château while she called to her mother and sisters, who swamped him with questions he could not answer about Lieutenant Nichols, Alberta Snyder and the other members of the battalion. He had no baggage, so he walked up and down the village street before going to Madame Poulnot's to rent a room. She gave him the upstairs room overlooking the garden, and since he was hungry cooked up an enormous omelet and opened a bottle of her choicest wine.

At sunset, he had stood upon the brow of the

hill, watching the shadows lengthening across the plain below and the red roofs glistening on other hilltops, and the fragrance of the fields came to him once again. As the sharp white dust lay still upon the roads, the rural peace and tranquillity settled upon his spirit. On his way to the square, he stopped in the churchyard, where long columns of names had been carved upon a memorial shaft at the foot of which were artificial wreaths and ribbons. The name Poulnot was there, and Bertrand and Panarioux and the other village names, most of them two or three times. The church door was open, and he had entered, crossed himself and sat down to rest. As he had straightened himself to go out, the figure of a girl in black had risen dimly from one of the benches and he had waited to let her pass at the doorway. In the light he had recognized the pale face of Madeleine, who kept the store.

III

THAT evening McCann had sat upon the counter in the store talking to Madeleine while Mme. Bertrand waited upon the customers. The girl's mother had been pleased to ascertain that McCann was a Catholic, for she was very pious. Already in the village, the women were conjecturing as to which of the girls McCann had returned to see. Madeleine with the aid of the almost forgotten French-English

dictionary was asking McCann about Sergeant Horn, who had stopped writing to her within two months after he had left Laferté.

The fact that she was in black on a weekday was due to a call she had made that afternoon at the home of an aunt in a neighboring village. Everybody in Laferté wore black on Sunday, but it became Madeleine especially because she was slender, with very white skin and a slightly plaintive expression.

On his way to Mme. Poulnot's, soon after nine o'clock, McCann in pulling a handkerchief from his pocket had jerked out his roll of bills and they had fallen to the ground. He picked them up and, afraid that he might lose them, gave the wad to Mme. Poulnot the next morning to keep for him. There were still forty-eight thousand francs, and to a peasant woman who still thought in terms of pre-war values that seemed a fortune. She began to lock her doors more carefully and to start at sudden noises, but she could not resist hinting to Mme. Bertrand and several others that the American was rich. This came to the ears of M. Bertrand, who had been vaguely uneasy at McCann's continual presence in the store.

The days went by, and McCann felt less and less inclined to leave Laferté. His difficulties in reaching there had dulled his desire for travel. The

lame notary taught him to fish, which he did sometimes in the afternoons, but he liked best to sleep until nearly noon, to eat a large breakfast and lunch, combined, to lie in the shade where he could see out over the country in the afternoon, and in the evening to get mildly drunk at Madeleine's place. Mme. Poulnot, at mealtimes, brought the conversation around to the subject of Madeleine as often as she could, and McCann was never loath to say that she was a splendid girl and very well-mannered.

McCann really did not know how it all happened. The village seemed to shape itself around the idea that he and Madeleine should marry and he, accustomed to a more direct method of procedure, did not realize when he agreed with Mme. Poulnot that it would be pleasant to remain in Laferté and live in the little apartment above the store, that he was paving the way for a proposal. Mme. Poulnot dressed herself in black and called upon the Bertrands, and this time she told them that she was keeping forty-eight thousand francs of McCann's money for him. The following Sunday afternoon, Mme. Poulnot invited the Bertrands for supper, and after the meal was cleared away and several bottles of old wine had been consumed, so that both McCann and M. Bertrand were extra genial and the faces of the women were flushed,

McCann found himself listening to a fatherly speech. Beside her mother, who smiled and nodded approvingly, sat Madeleine, blushing and extremely embarrassed, and McCann stepped to her side and kissed her forehead while the others raised glasses and clinked them elaborately.

He and his wife were getting old, M. Bertrand explained, and had saved enough to keep them from want. They had little to offer as a dowry except the store which would become Madeleine's the day of her wedding.

Even the next morning, a languid existence in the loveliest village he had ever seen, with a store the shelves of which were lined with dust-covered bottles, and a pale gentle wife who would never scold him for drinking, appeared quite reasonable to McCann. He was told by Mme. Poulnot what he must do to be a proper fiancé, the notary wrote out several documents in French which he signed good-naturedly without trying to read them, the priest blessed him and smiled after his final confession as a benedict, a traveling tailor made him a frock coat such as the mayor wore, and, after a brief ceremony in the town hall one sunny morning, he led Madeleine, almost hidden in white veils, into the little chapel where the priest confirmed the civil rites.

The wedding party, consisting of more than

half the village, walked two and two down the main street, paraded through the shaded grounds of the château where Mme. Chernon served them champagne beneath the trees, and then sat down to an enormous luncheon during which the priest ate at a separate table and joined good-naturedly in the singing of ribald songs. The elder Bertrands moved to the vacant house beside the store, Mme. Bertrand gave her daughter the keys to the cash box, weeping softly as she did so, and McCann stretched out luxuriously in the huge old-fashioned bed with four carved posts and a canopy, facing the window which overlooked the village square. In their most intimate moments, McCann suspected that Madeleine was thinking of Sergeant Horn. This thought troubled him hardly at all. She was dutiful and solicitous. She slipped quietly out of bed each morning to open the store in time to receive the milk, brought his late breakfast to his bedside, adding ham and eggs to the usual French breakfast of coffee and rolls, mended his clothes and laid out his black frock coat for mass on Sunday. They never spoke of complicated things, since his French did not permit it. He did, nevertheless, learn the names of most of the articles in the store so that he could help her when two or three customers came in at once. His money, of which forty-seven thousand francs remained, he gave to

his father-in-law, who rushed it into a bank at Fays-Billot so that when McCann needed any loose change he took it from the cash box. His mother-in-law and his father-in-law, freed for the first time in years from the routine of store-keeping, took trips to Langres and even to Paris, visited all their relatives, and perhaps with a slight defensive impulse extolled McCann as a son-in-law. His ways were slightly different, they admitted, but in the course of time they felt sure he would adopt the customs of the country.

When winter was announced by several weeks of rain, Madeleine began to cough in the early mornings and McCann, who had slept so much that its luxury was beginning to wear away, being also a bit conscience-stricken because she did so much of the work, insisted upon getting up to meet the milkman and starting the fire to make the coffee.

But it made the days seem long and now and then he would feel an impulse to leave the store and have a quiet drink or a game of cards in the café across the square. In fact, before many days he made a practice of sitting each afternoon in the village café and became aware of a slight displeasure on the part of his father-in-law. One evening, after Madeleine and he had dined with the old folks, M. Bertrand took advantage of a moment

when the women were examining some bed linen to speak to McCann tactfully about his patronage of the little tavern behind the butcher shop. It was, it seemed, the place where hired farm hands and the less industrious of Laferté's inhabitants were accustomed to gather. The wine was cheap and watered, M. Bertrand was sure, the widow who owned the place was thought to have consorted with colored soldiers while a labor battalion had been billeted in town, and several years before a drunken man had murdered one of his fellow teamsters there.

Having begun to admonish McCann, M. Bertrand thought it his duty to continue and he suggested that while during the war an olive drab army shirt was an honorable garment, in peace times, for the proprietor of a store of long-established reputation to wear clothes which did not distinguish him from a laborer, was embarrassing to his relatives. M. Bertrand confided to McCann that he had been born at Langres and while he had been forty years at Laferté he had never permitted himself to lapse into the ways of peasants who knew no better.

The following Saturday evening, M. Bertrand and McCann took the train to Langres, which miles to the west dominated the broad plains from a hill-top. It was an old walled city, the fortifications of which had stood a thousand years, and its main cob-

bled square was bright with the colors and noises of a traveling fair. They had dinner at the best hotel, drank burgundy and champagne and popped at paper ducks in the shooting gallery. But in the morning they purchased six white laundered shirts of the type M. Bertrand wore, with various flaps, buttons and accessories the use of which McCann did not understand. The collars were high and stiff, and M. Bertrand promised to give McCann plenty of ties which had only to be hooked over the stud. For a while, each morning in the unheated bedroom McCann struggled into one of the white shirts but soon he postponed this act until lunch time, reluctantly shedding his army flannel as Madeleine was setting the table. The afternoons dragged, the mud became more treacherous in the village square and trade fell off, as it always did in winter. There were no English books or newspapers and McCann could never make enough progress in French to read easily. Madeleine showed the effects of the weather, although she kept up her daily work, and at night was so pale and exhausted that she had to go to bed right after dinner.

The mild qualities of Madeleine's character kept McCann in awe of her. He never spoke loudly to her and if he put his arm around her waist, as they stood by the counter, he did so with care. She looked her best in church, dressed in black, with

the light of candles and the shadows of rising incense playing upon her sensitive features. McCann could not imagine her committing anything which might even approach a sin, and yet she confessed and drew him regularly to confession. For the first time in his life, McCann found himself at a loss for plausible words in the booth.

Still, after several bleak evenings, he waited until the Bertrands had turned out their lights and lowered their shutters, then tiptoed through the mud to the back room of the café behind the butcher shop. It was not long before he returned from there each night quite late, by village reckoning, and in a merry frame of mind. Madeleine never made the slightest objection. She preferred that he should amuse himself, she said, because it made him less taciturn. When M. Bertrand found it out, however, he was less tactful than in his first reproaches and Madeleine, who had never before questioned her father's judgment, defended her husband with an asperity which surprised them all. Mme. Bertrand had always been fond of McCann and took more pains than did her daughter to correct his continuous errors in French. The mother sided for the moment with Madeleine and the incident developed into a family quarrel in which McCann alone was unable to take part. It ended with M. Bertrand's being deeply hurt.

Strangely enough, M. Bertrand resumed friendly relations with McCann before he became reconciled with his wife and daughter.

"I am sorry," the old man said. "We should never discuss such things with women." And he continued in a most reasonable mood to ask if the wines and liqueurs in the store were in any way inadequate. If McCann wanted any special brands, he had only to order them. If he wanted to play cards, there were his father-in-law, the notary and many respectable men who asked nothing better than to have a game to pass the dreary evenings. One became dull and degenerate, he explained, if some standards were not kept up in village life.

The widow who ran the butcher shop was not long in guessing the reason for McCann's ceasing to patronize her place and spoke bitterly of M. Bertrand's jealousy to the villagers most friendly to her. In the meantime, McCann thought of his old friend Mme. Poulnot and one night after the Bertrands were in bed took refuge in her warm kitchen. One of her young nieces whose husband had gone to the Congo had come to visit her and the three sat around the old wooden table laughing and drinking until eleven o'clock each night; but Solange was always under Mme. Poulnot's eye and the latter was careful to afford no opportunity for any embarrassing intrigues to develop. On his way out of the

Poulnot gave one night when he was too tipsy to be careful, McCann had met one of the café customers who spread the news, and the next day, in a rage, M. Bertrand openly accused McCann of being unfaithful to Madeleine. Mme. Poulnot was struck off the list of friends and the niece, who was dark-eyed, lithe and had an almost provocative air, could no longer appear on the village street without causing sly comment.

Mme. Bertrand was the first to question Madeleine as to why she was not showing the results which might have been expected from her marriage. The mother teased her daughter a bit at first and when she was met with evasive replies grew more insistent. M. Bertrand joined in, joking about the situation at the table and leading to the subject from all sorts of remote beginnings. Madeleine's disposition could not bear up under such continual nagging, and she knew that McCann was restless and unhappy. She began to hate the village in which she had always lived, to dislike her prying neighbors, few of whom refrained from hinting that it was time she was pregnant.

The two years he had spent in the army had unfitted McCann for any such routine as that to which he was subjected. Every move he made was watched and discussed. If he could have gotten his hands on his money, he would have left the place


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on the evening train some dark night and let it slip from his mind. Still Madeleine had been so kind to him he shrank from leaving her and he was afraid to suggest to his father-in-law that his money should be taken from the bank, believing the old man would read his thoughts and perhaps have him arrested.

The matter came to a climax one evening when the family was at dinner. M. Bertrand remarked that Madeleine should have married a Frenchman. With a fury she had never shown before, his daughter turned on him and told him to mind his own business, that she would never enter his house again and hoped he would stay out of the store. McCann, indignant enough, was unable to express himself, so he followed his wife through the door and most of the night tried to stop her crying. She did not relent for many days and her parents, once they began to fear they had actually estranged her, were willing to make any concessions at all. Gradually, relations were resumed, but Madeleine kept the upper hand. She told her mother what she should do and kept her father stepping softly. The tension made her paler, she coughed even in warm weather and McCann, who had always been afraid of her frailness, treated her more and more as an invalid.

At a time when he was most conscience-stricken because he knew he should leave her sooner

or later at the mercy of her parents and the neighbors, she proposed a solution herself. He suspected it was really due to her incredible unselfishness and afterwards reproached himself from time to time for taking advantage of it.

"We must leave Laferté," she said. "You are not happy here and neither am I. We should sell the store and buy a little café in Paris, where perhaps at first you can get other work to do. That way we can get along and slowly, as we make money, we can sell our small business and buy a larger one until we are independent. Many others have done the same thing.

"I want to see the world," she said. "I have never been farther than Langres, and the pictures I have seen of Paris are very beautiful. Father and mother will cry, but it is the way things go."

M. and Mme. Bertrand collapsed with grief, to such an extent that all the neighbors, even the formerly hostile ones, began to pity them. The father raised all possible objections and finally, as a last resort, advanced the argument that McCann, knowing no French, could not find work in Paris. As the idea became more familiar, M. Bertrand enlarged upon it and finally, to keep Madeleine with them, said he would agree to her plan if McCann would first go to Paris alone and establish himself to receive her. This offered an escape to McCann, so he

joined in with M. Bertrand and Madeleine finally agreed.

As he had walked beside her down the long hill and across the flat to the rose-covered station, McCann made her the most ardent protestations of love he had ever uttered. And for many nights he missed her, almost to the point of returning to Laferté.

#### IV

AGAIN my afternoons were free, so I revisited the picturesque corners I had found the previous year and discovered many others. In my haphazard fashion I had become interested in Oriental sculpture and fabrics and spent much time in the little museum by the Parc Monceau, studying the figurines from Chinese graves. Having read that a marvelous Persian carpet, given by the Shah to Peter the Great and in turn presented by Peter to the former Emperor of Austria, was to be on exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in the rue de Rivoli, I went there one afternoon and for two hours stood before the great carpet, watching the rich colors seep through their neutral background only to recede and to give place to other hues as a passing cloud changed the light. The border was in Arabic script with symbolic tigers and trees miraculously interwoven. The pattern, infinitely

complicated, preserved the elements of simple design, and seemed to rearrange the scrambled atoms of my brain into a sort of harmony. I left the place in an exalted mood and, without noticing where I was going, walked farther out the rue de Rivoli, beneath the archway, toward the place de la Concorde. With the tones of that magnificent carpet still striking fifths and octaves through my head, I became aware of a familiar figure in the sidewalk crowd ahead, and just as he turned into one of the little shops I identified it with McCann. I had never seen him in daylight before, except for his one visit to the office.

I stopped in front of the shop and grew more curious as to why he should be entering there, since it was in a most expensive district and in the windows were displayed antique fabrics and jewelry, shawls, fans, unusual prints, sketches by artists long dead, faïence, vases and trays of porcelain or of copper. Nothing seemed more incongruous in connection with McCann, so I followed him in.

The light was dim, arranged to fall upon certain precious objects, so that I was close upon him before he saw me. When he did, his face showed consternation and he stepped behind a pillar draped with fabrics as if he hoped I had not seen him and wished to avoid me. This surprised me so that I stopped short where I was and, turning in the direc-

tion from which McCann had moved, saw a terrified face not four feet away, behind the counter. The woman was pale, with honey-colored hair and large dark eyes which even in that light were marked by dark circles beneath. Her hands clutched the counter and she stared straight at me as if I were the one who had frightened her. For a moment I was dumfounded.

How I reached my next conclusion, I cannot say. It was one of those instances where, with the blood pounding in one's forehead and one's conscious faculties routed, little devices like the metal hooks in an adding machine click into place and confront one with a fact. I, too, began to tremble for somehow I knew in an instant that the woman before me was Alberta Snyder and that she had been watching me following McCann.

I could not say a word, but my first thought was to reassure her. Not a single pretext offered itself to explain my presence. All the money I had would have been insufficient to purchase a single article in the store. I did not want to admit that I had come to look for McCann, for that possibility was what evidently had startled her.

It was an idiotic thing to do, but I sort of backed out of the aisle, nearly knocking over a huge porcelain garden vase, and finding myself on the sidewalk crossed the street in a panic between

swerving taxicabs and hurried into the Tuileries. Once there, I sat weakly upon a bench and tried to decide what to do. Details of Alberta's face, which had impressed itself vividly upon me, became clear in retrospect and I was appalled by the suffering which was written there. I forgot McCann, and everything except my desire to spare her needless worry. To return would throw her into hysterics and to leave her with no explanation of my clumsy entrance and exit might do her still more harm.

I was unnerved by the shock her quick materialization had given me, and yet, five minutes after I had confronted her, it seemed inevitable that I should have found her. How could I have carried her so constantly in my thoughts, have followed her hopes and aspirations and disappointments so minutely, without having her appear before me in the end? Every word I had heard about her, every image I had constructed, took on new significance with her pale face suspended before me in the air. I remembered the snapshot her mother had shown me,—braided hair and a white dress for her graduation,—phrases Alberta had written in exaltation or perplexity.

Did any one know her as well as I? Surely not her mother, nor her comrades, nor her lover. Not even she herself, with her tormented spirit.

The more I thought about the attitude of Mc-



Cann, the more it puzzled me. The suspicion I had always had that he was withholding something grew stronger. I believed he would avoid the market café, not having been sure whether or not I had seen him in the shop. And what if I had seen him? What was there in that fact to scare him away? Alberta's terror I believed to be due to the fact that I had appeared to know McCann and thus might know about her past. Merely from her gesture, I was able to infer many things. I was obliged to do so.

The sun was getting low and the hour had arrived at which I usually had dinner, but I was too uneasy to eat. I wanted to find McCann at once. I telephoned the office to ask for the night off, then rushed to the prefecture of police, where one of the hangers-on, a Frenchman, was paid a small fee by the paper to keep us informed about certain routine events. With his help, I was able to examine the hotel records for the day on which M. Bertrand had been to Paris, on the slight hope that McCann might have taken his father-in-law to the hotel in which he lived. Because he always had left the market café on foot and started in the direction of Saint Eustache, I guessed that the hotel might be in that neighborhood and after an hour's search I found the slip M. Bertrand had signed. It gave his domicile as Laferté-sur-Amance and was from the

Hôtel de la Légion d'Honneur et du Brésil in the rue de Montmorency.

The Hôtel de la Légion d'Honneur et du Brésil was not nearly as prepossessing as its name. The stairway was worn and dingy, and the office was located on the second floor where the smells from the kitchen of a cheap restaurant blended with mold from the plaster walls. The proprietor was at dinner in an adjoining room, so I called to him to ask, on a chance, if Monsieur McCann was in.

"Yes. He's in his room. Number 12," the proprietor said.

I climbed two more flights and fumbled in the dark corridor until my eyes became accustomed to the light and I was able to read the room numbers. I knocked. There was no response, still I had the feeling there was some one on the other side of the door. I knocked again, and called his name. This time he replied hesitantly and I opened the door. He was too much surprised to dissemble.

"Why didn't you tell me Alberta Snyder was in Paris?" I asked. He started to make some evasive reply, then floundered.

"Let's go somewhere and eat," I said, and he took up his cap obediently to follow me. Once started talking, he was evidently relieved to tell me everything that had happened.

The farther the train had carried him from La-

ferté, he said, the less real his marriage had seemed to him. It was an adventure like the war in which nothing made sense. M. Bertrand had given him a thousand francs and had told him to write for more if he had difficulty in finding work. McCann had found the hotel in which he had occupied a room while still in Casey's service, had loafed on the terrace of the boulevard cafés, and in the beginning had thought haphazardly about looking for a job. It would be fine to have a little café in Paris, he thought, with a small zinc bar of his own and Madeleine to cook his meals. But he had no idea where to find work. The bootblack who had tipped him off to the winner of the Grand Prix had died of delirium tremens. All his army acquaintances had gone back to the States. A few Americans drove taxicabs, but McCann had never driven a car and didn't know the city.

One week passed, then two. He had written a few awkward letters to Madeleine but with such difficulty that he soon gave it up and was content to receive from her each week a page or two in her delicate handwriting in which she offered all her solicitude and longed to see him again. He could imagine the covert remarks of the customers and the watchfulness of her parents, and the affection he felt for her made him uncomfortable when he got to thinking, but he drifted into a lazy routine

similar to that of the village except there was no store to tend and no M. Bertrand to sulk when he sat for hours in a café. He got well enough acquainted with the owner and the servant in his hotel to chat with them in pigeon French, several bartenders got to know him, and periodically he wrote M. Bertrand for more money which always arrived promptly. M. Bertrand, having gotten rid of his American son-in-law temporarily, was secretly relieved by McCann's lack of success. McCann, however, feeling the vague guilt which often accompanies idleness, grew more reluctant to ask for his money as he needed it, particularly because he often drank too much and spent more than he had intended. He learned slowly that in the smaller bars drinks cost less than on the boulevards and he began to patronize cheap restaurants in the neighborhood of his hotel. It was due to this economy that I had met him in the market café, I suppose.

Some time before our first encounter, McCann had been walking along the rue de Rivoli late one afternoon. He had been living on a few francs a day for nearly a fortnight to postpone writing M. Bertrand and had reached such a degree of lassitude that he had neglected to shave. Standing in the window of a shop with her arms stretched high above her head in the act of hanging up a shawl was Alberta Snyder. McCann had been amazed. She did

not notice him and in a moment had stepped down from the window and disappeared in the shop. He had entered and had found her alone, near the rear of the main room, counting the cash.

"Hello, Lieutenant," he had said, and held out his hand.

He had not been at all prepared for what followed. She had stifled a scream and turned dead-white and before he realized what was happening had stuffed a five-hundred-franc note into his hand and had begged him to go away. Afraid some one would enter and conclude because of his unkempt condition and her fright that he was robbing the place, McCann had hurried out, the money still in his hand, and had intended to return it to her. But upon entering his hotel the proprietor had reminded him his rent was overdue and he, with a careless gesture, had said the matter had slipped his mind and had handed over the five-hundred francs, which more than covered his bill.

He had been anxious to explain to Miss Snyder that he had meant no harm and to assure her he would pay back the money, but in the meantime Madeleine sent a despairing letter saying that her situation was becoming unbearable and that her father had even hinted she should get a legal separation from him. This she would never do, she insisted, but she wanted him to take her out of Laferté. She

would be willing to work herself, if necessary. Purely to cheer her up, McCann had replied that he had found work at last, although he did not go into details as to the nature of it. This had cut off his principal source of revenue. He wrote his father-in-law that he had had to begin at a very low salary but that prospects for advancement were good, and had mentioned that he must have the proper clothes. This time M. Bertrand, dismayed that Madeleine's plan might eventualize after all, delayed mailing the money order and sent less than McCann had expected.

It was not long before McCann was down to his last franc and owed small sums to his hotel keeper and to the waiter in the restaurant he patronized. When the latter refused him further credit, McCann had gotten the idea of calling again upon Miss Snyder, explaining the situation to her, and borrowing enough, if possible, to run him until he could get money from Laferté. She had been even more terrified the second time, although he was clean-shaven and approached her very carefully, but he had waited until she was alone in the store. She had listened so nervously to what he said that the words had made no impression and again she had given him money and pleaded with him to stay away. He had never returned to the shop until the afternoon I found him there, but he had felt much



ashamed because of the construction she must have placed upon his acts.

His meeting with me, I learned, had solved one of his problems for it had prompted him to define his mysterious job as that of a reporter and his father-in-law had been genuinely impressed. The purpose of the old man's visit, however, had been to tell McCann that Madeleine was really very ill, that being separated from him was wearing upon her, and in the end M. Bertrand had capitulated completely and urged McCann to return to the village which the latter had promised to do. I saw McCann for the last time on the following afternoon, accompanied him to the Gare de l'Est, and shook hands with him and with his father-in-law as they stepped aboard the train.

## V

I CANNOT say how many hours I lurked about the sidewalks of the rue de Rivoli or paced the dusty area in the Tuileries, peering through the iron fence toward the doorway of the shop across the street and feeling furtive and ridiculous. In no way could I contrive to approach Alberta Snyder. I was sure she would remember my face in connection with McCann.

The shop was marked *Chez Nicole* and apparently was owned by a short stocky Frenchwoman

who wore severe tailored suits and kept her hair clipped short. She had a square jaw and shrewd gray eyes and strode in and out of the doorway with an aggressive air which startled me when once she caught me staring at her. Two French girls who dressed quite modestly and looked enough alike to be sisters also worked there and the clientele was both wealthy and select. Alberta remained in the shop each day until half past six or seven o'clock and I could not refrain from following her one evening to find out where she lived. I saw her enter an apartment house of which the two lower floors were occupied by business offices, near the corner of the rue Saint Honoré and the rue des Pyramides. On two occasions, a few moments after she had entered I saw the curtains move in the top apartment and concluded that was hers. I hesitated to ask the concierge, fearing that he might tell Alberta a man had been inquiring for her. Once I conceived the idea of writing to her, explaining my meeting with her mother and the chance encounters which had placed me in possession of so many facts she needed to restore her peace of mind. After several afternoons of futile attempts I gave up the notion. I was not even sure she was using her real name at the store or in the apartment house, and the law regarding identification papers was beginning to be enforced so strictly that I might have brought

trouble upon her by raising the slightest question as to who she was.

What worried me most was a certain hardness which had crept into her face. At her age I could not have expected her to resemble a high-school photograph but the expression I had noticed had nothing to do with her years. It betrayed a state of mind, an assumed relentlessness. In the shop she was always busy and the girls there treated her with deference and admiration. I heard customers coming from the store speak German, French and English and on one occasion the stocky Frenchwoman had to call to Alberta from the doorway to interpret an English remark, so I deduced that Alberta's ability as a linguist was one of her principal assets. Everything in the shop was in excellent taste. The Frenchwoman often entered with packages or small unwrapped objects under her arm, so the selection of the goods might have been due to her, but Alberta trimmed the windows and did so with an art which made them attractive on a street where windows were famous.

It was my bad fortune that at the moment the Frenchwoman called to Alberta a taxicab started up with a disconcerting uproar, so I missed my best chance to find out by what name Alberta was known. Worse than that, the woman saw me staring again and, recalling vaguely that I seemed to have

annoyed her before, grew angry and was, I think, on the point of confronting me to ask me what my business was there. She was a very determined-looking person and I turned quickly and walked away as fast as I could. Thereafter I did not dare to loiter long around the doorway.

For several days, the situation remained at dead center. I could get no more information and could find no way in which to impart the information I had. Still I blundered on and I had my dinner early each evening in order to pass the building in which Alberta lived on the chance of seeing her open a window four stories above the street or disappear into the antiquated elevator and ascend inch by inch behind clouded glass doors. One evening as I was standing across the street from her doorway I noticed a cardboard sign in the concierge's window of the building which faced Alberta's apartment. The sign advertised for rent a small apartment and I was puzzled by it, since apartments were in great demand in that quarter. At the same moment the possibility of living where I might watch her made my nerves tingle and clouded my scruples and my common sense. I inquired of the concierge, knowing there must be some defect in the rooms in question. She said I probably would not like the apartment since it was necessary to climb five hard stairways in order to reach it and there was no run-



ning water. Stairs and water meant nothing whatever to me, I replied. I must have an apartment facing the street. Reluctantly she struggled up the five stairways behind me and as I stood in the small front window of the bedroom I looked directly across the narrow street into Alberta's living room. She was seated at a table, wrapped in a light blue negligee, eating. Being one story higher, I could see nearly everything in the room, even the doorway which led to the bedroom behind it. The walls were hung with tapestries and the furniture was of the Empire period.

I was so pleased that the concierge detected my enthusiasm, decided perhaps that I had been paid for spying on somebody, and quoted me a figure much dearer than she had had in her mind, I am sure. I was in no mood to bargain. I paid a deposit with all the money I had with me and reflected as I descended the stairs that I might cook my luncheons in the small kitchen and thus save a part of the difference in rent. So the next day I left the rue de la Huchette after a final glance over the gargoyled roof of Notre Dame and lugged my suitcase and typewriter to the attic in the rue Saint Honoré. The concierge asked me when my trunk would arrive and was more suspicious than ever when I was obliged to admit that I had no trunk. In fact I took my typewriter out the following night and pawned

it in the municipal loan office in order to pay the three months' rent she demanded. Once she had received all her money, the concierge paid no further attention to me.

How badly I had thought out the plan is evident from the fact that the only hours at which I could watch Alberta fell between the time she arrived home from the shop and the moment when I had to leave for the office, at quarter of eight. If I slept more than three or four hours, she would be gone before I awoke. My night off came three days after I had moved, and, with my light turned out, I sat in my window until after midnight catching a glimpse of her as she passed from one room to another and straining my eyes as she sat in her window to dry her hair, which she had been washing. Her movements were restless, her air distracted. The inconsequential things with which she occupied herself she did with too much vigor and finished doing too quickly. She never sat long in any one chair, and although I saw her pick up a book now and then, she seemed unable to read it steadily. I had hoped there would be a piano, but there was none.

Loneliness, I thought, was the one trial she should have spared herself. Each evening was ominous. She would change her clothes, and in doing so stretched her arms outward or held her hands tightly



behind her head as if her body ached for exercise. Her maid prepared and served her dinner, then said good night, and a few moments later I heard her heels click on the sidewalk below. The meal appeared to be elaborate but Alberta tasted her food fastidiously, as if she were ready at any moment to find fault with it. The maid seemed apprehensive and nervous as she offered each course or took away the plates.

After midnight, Alberta turned off the light in the front room and went to her bedroom to undress, and as I watched I felt no shame. I had imagined her as a child in school and as a mature woman like her mother, with silver hair. I had visualized her naked on the banks of the Amance, with water sparkling on her limbs and shoulders, or digging vermin from her collar in the trenches of the Argonne. I had seen her moods and her aspirations scrawled hastily on Y.M.C.A. paper, had heard the quality of her voice in Lida Wetherby's slow New England cadences. Why should I have turned away as she slid her long garment from her shoulders? I had known that her skin was white, that her flesh was firm and strong, that her destiny was unfulfilled. I had been carried away by her idealism and her thirst for life, I should have liked to spare her disillusionment. How much of myself had been Lieutenant Nichols helping her toward

the front, or Hermann Luttenschlager nursing her back to a reality of which he was none too sure himself? Clothed or unclothed, she had become my obsession and my responsibility.

A faint warning like a tom-tom stirred behind my brain, but I could only be aware of it without the power to obey. She opened the bed, sat staring among the pillows a time, then reached above her head and everything was dark. It was reassuring even then for me to look in the direction I knew she was lying and to think she would be there when the dawn came and that if I wished I had only to wait to see her arise. I was too excited to sleep and my mind was racing pointlessly from one thing to another. I was glad she was so lovely. I was glad she was supple and strong, and then the hardness in her countenance and the fear which came so readily to her eyes oppressed me again and I worried about her unhealthy solitude and the evasion of things which would not let her rest.

When the paper arrived in the morning, I picked it up dutifully to glance at the headlines. On an inside page was a column to aid tourists with their shopping, written by an American spinster who had lived in Paris twenty years and who was reputed to know every one in town. At once it occurred to me to ask Bettina James about the shop called *Chez Nicole*. Bettina had been there several times and had

recommended Nicole's fabrics and art objects occasionally. The proprietress, Madame Joly, was a strange and eccentric woman, Bettina told me. My question prompted her to inquire and within three days Bettina came to me with a whole array of facts and conjectures. Bettina was a lean, rather cynical and very good-natured woman who had listened to the troubles of so many of her male colleagues that she was as free with words as she was cautious in action.

Madame Joly, it seemed, had owned the shop for fifteen years and during the war had been one of the first women in Paris to drive a street car. It was at that period that she began wearing masculine suits and her voice, exposed to all kinds of weather and strained by calling out streets and transfer points and quarreling with starters, had taken on its guttural tones. Of course during the hostilities there had been no market for antiques, although Madame Joly had overlooked no occasion to buy beautiful and rare objects from the impoverished aristocracy. Then, according to Bettina, she had fallen desperately in love with a blonde army nurse on duty in a Paris hospital. The two women had made no effort to conceal their infatuation and spent the hours they were off duty in Madame Joly's apartment above the shop. Their quarrels, jealousies and reconciliations became one of the jokes of the

quarter. A year after they had been together, an army surgeon under whose eyes the nurse worked constantly developed a passion for her and, when he found out about the Joly affair, was so angry and chagrined that he had the nurse transferred to a field hospital in the farthest corner of France and blocked all efforts of Madame Joly to communicate with her. A stray shell hit the hospital and killed the nurse. Madame Joly sought out the doctor and stabbed him, the knife luckily glancing off his shoulder blade. The doctor had preferred no charges against her.

All that was known of Madame Joly's early marriage was that it had lasted but two days. After the war, when the tourists began to flock to Paris and trade grew beyond the volume at which it had been interrupted, Madame Joly, wearing black tailored coats with a black band around her arm, reopened her place, but she was greatly handicapped by her lack of English. The girls she hired learned English in French schools and by their intelligent expression while listening to it bewildered the customers more than French-speaking clerks would have done. It was the one weakness in a promising enterprise.

The exact story of Madame Joly's meeting with Alberta, known in the store as Mademoiselle Alberte, Bettina had not been able to verify; but while the

various people who told different versions disagreed as to details the main facts were not dissimilar. According to the most plausible of them, Madame Joly had been sitting in the Luxembourg Gardens one afternoon when she had noticed upon a bench there a young woman with a pale and beautiful face dressed in clothes which resembled those of an Alsatian peasant woman. It was evident the young woman was ill and troubled, and so Madame Joly had sat beside her tactfully and asked her in French if there was anything she could do. Even those who made fun of Madame Joly admitted she was generous and kind-hearted; and evidently she had impressed Alberta favorably, for she took her home with her and in a few days had bought her Parisian clothes and given her a position in the shop.

The neighbors took it for another love affair and watched the women gleefully. Alberta, with her light wavy hair and sea-blue eyes which seemed darker for their contrast with her pale skin, was not unlike the nurse in appearance. They lived in Madame Joly's apartment, were seldom seen without one another, and Alberta had formed the habit of taking the older woman's arm in crossing a busy street or entering a restaurant. In the store, Alberta quickly became indispensable. Madame Joly was free to buy the goods, and under her painstaking instruction Alberta's French became as fluent as her

English or German. No one knew her nationality, except that she was not French.

Three months after their meeting, something had happened between them. Madame Joly had come down one morning drawn and pallid, almost hysterical, and that same day Alberta had moved to the rue Saint Honoré and had remained there since. It was a case, Bettina said, such as was not uncommon among French husbands and wives. The business partnership outlasted the amorous attraction.

I knew better, but did not take the trouble to correct her. Still some expression on my face must have betrayed my state of mind for Bettina, accustomed to teasing all the men in the office about their affairs, smiled maliciously and said:

"I hope I'm not wrecking one of your little romances."

Nothing I could do would stop the blood from suffusing my cheeks and at that she took further advantage of my embarrassment.

"You have restored my faith in men," she said. "To think of having reached your age and still being able to blush."

## VI

How Alberta had reached Paris I could only guess, but since the watch she now carried was of gold, with a plain gold band around her



wrist, I suspected she had sold the platinum one of which Weller had spoken in order to get from the Alsatian border to the capital and that the sum she had received for it had been insufficient to buy clothes as well. I could not accept Bettina's version of her association with Madame Joly and it seemed entirely plausible that she had misunderstood the nature of the Frenchwoman's feelings for her until the night of their separation.

There was, of course, a certain assurance in Alberta's manner and a mild hostility to men which might mislead any one who was given to jumping at such conclusions. I remembered Mary Fahey's remark to McCann at Laferté by which the Irish girl had admitted she had thought at first Alberta might be queer.

The first time I saw her alone with Madame Joly I was quite convinced that the sudden discovery of the latter's infatuation had been a severe shock to Alberta, not only in its personal application to her but in its implications with respect to men and women generally. Again I winced to think of her having to bear such a disturbing enlightenment at a time when she was in a fair way to gain full control of herself once more.

No longer could I confine my observations to one evening a week. I disliked routine reporting, especially in Paris where it means a continual round

of interviews with fatuous business men, opera singers, moving picture directors, big-game hunters, and the various visitors from America who can afford first-class railway carriages and expensive hotels. But I asked the editor if he would transfer me to the day side, temporarily at least, and he consented, not without a few sly remarks based upon hints Bettina had let drop. Thus, by eating my meals at odd hours, I was able to be in my window each evening when Alberta arrived home from the shop and to remain there until she extended her arm upwards against the dark headboard of the Empire bed to press the button which extinguished the light.

The first evening Madame Joly called I realized something unusual was to happen because, instead of sitting about in her negligee, Alberta kept fully dressed and glanced downward at the sidewalk at the hour when ordinarily the maid would begin to serve dinner. The two women met with some constraint and the meal seemed to proceed rather stiffly, but after the maid had gone home Madame Joly began smoking cigarettes furiously and walking the floor and I could hear the rise and fall of her deep voice across the street although I could not make out a word she said. Gradually Alberta relaxed and from her attitude I believed she felt a genuine pity for her employer. Alberta's gestures and postures

were extraordinarily expressive, as if that were the one way in which she could reveal her thoughts without self-consciousness. I saw her rise, when Madame Joly turned her back and leaned from the window, place her arm about the older woman's shoulders and I heard her speak softly and comfortingly. They both sat down again, but close together, and talked until very late. At the door, although Madame Joly made no move as she said good night, Alberta kissed her cheek and sent her away exuberant.

From that time on, they often dined together, either in the apartment or in some select restaurant, and as their intimacy was resumed I was astonished to find myself having symptoms of jealousy. I resented it when she kept Alberta out late and one evening when Alberta had a headache and Madame Joly sat by her bedside and brought cold cloths to lay upon her forehead I left my window in a huff and walked the streets until I was sure she would be gone. Not seeing her depart, I began to wonder if she really had gone out, ashamed of myself for feeling so, but I got in such a state I could not sleep and the next day wrote such a spiteful account of the banal remarks of an important banker that the manager of the Paris branch complained and the editor had to ask me to be careful.

Too many years cannot pass without my being

reminded of my unlimited capacity for idiocy. Without my being able to detect its point of departure, my interest in Alberta Snyder subtly shifted its basis, in the face of all reason. I began to await her appearances with an anxiety which increased when she did come within my range of vision. I actually came to believe at times that since I knew so much about her sufferings, I was the one to heal them. Every obstacle to such an eventuality presented itself to me, harassed me and was in turn disregarded. I could not quite relinquish all my common sense, and that made my situation the more difficult because there was always an undercurrent of misgivings which spoiled the moments of exaltation.

Instead of being content to watch her and to hope for her safety and happiness, I tried to think of ways of introducing myself. And what dismayed me most were the indications of her prosperity. The things she sold brought enormous prices and large profits and it was evident she was almost, if not actually, a partner in the establishment. The restaurants she patronized were far beyond my means, the clothes she wore would have taken the combined payroll of our whole editorial staff to buy. She was surrounded with expensive trappings, sat in chairs which had belonged at least to duchesses, owned more handbags than I had ever had socks. When I

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saw her in evening dress, with a poise I knew I could shatter with three syllables, I was almost tempted to do so. On other occasions when she was tired and distraught I wanted actually to throw myself at her feet. I followed her on crowded sidewalks and sometimes walked near enough to breathe her perfume or to brush the fabric of her dress. Absurdly I sat for hours thinking of ways to make money. I wrote special articles and book reviews, got one or two publicity jobs on the side, but I could not do justice even to my routine work and the moment I had an extra hundred francs the food in the cheap eating houses would gag me. My clothes, which were shabby enough, disgusted me and I ordered a new suit and a Tuxedo which took up my extra earnings for three months in advance. The successful men with whom I talked each day, I began to respect and envy, and the tone of my interviews changed so markedly that the editor congratulated me for having taken his suggestion so well. My colleagues offered to propose my name for the American Club.

To console myself I tried to think of Alberta's wholesome bringing up, the cottage on Cape Cod, her frugal years at the Conservatory, and I would heap the blame on Madame Joly for corrupting her tastes until I hated the woman and planned all sorts of retaliatory measures.

As I grew miserable, Madame Joly's enjoyment of life increased and with it Alberta's. They were together nearly always and I could see Alberta's diffident surprise and catch the echo of her pleased exclamations as the woman brought her presents or sent her magnificent flowers. She had no time to brood and really showed great improvement in health, especially after Madame Joly had bought a roadster in which they ran about the country on pleasure trips, during which they invariably found salable articles in the houses of peasants or upon the walls and mantelpieces of the inns at which they stopped. I should have rejoiced that Alberta was happy, that her days and nights were crammed with entertaining moments and that, whatever else she had on her mind, her material success was so well assured. Yet the sort of happiness in which she was indulging had its dangers. She could not appear in a public place without having the eyes of all the men and women upon her, though it seemed to me that her beauty threw off an increasing coldness which made it more forbidding. I wondered if she would again be able to bear the rubbing of army underwear on her soft skin or eat three or four vile concoctions from the same mess kit. I asked myself with still more misgivings whether she would be capable again of an enthusiasm in the interest of her country or her sex.

Of course, I realized dimly at the time that I should have been grateful to Madame Joly for lavishing such attentions upon the one I was unable to aid, but I was capable of no such unselfishness. In fact, I once descended to sending Alberta a huge bunch of violets without a card and enjoying from my window the little ways in which the evening went wrong. In the course of their business, they met many cultured men and often Madame Joly was caught between her professional interests and her strong personal jealousy.

It was strange how my own jealous thoughts were dispelled as soon as Alberta was alone. In those moments, rare enough, her frank and exquisite beauty would overwhelm me and I would say to myself as I saw her dress, perhaps, that she conducted herself before her mirror with none of that coquettishness which marks a woman less candid. She drew on her stockings neatly and they remained without a wrinkle until she took them off. If she seemed pleased with a new costume, I felt it was because she herself liked the looks of it and not because it was calculated to turn some one else's head. Her frame was so large and strong and her expression so earnest that she had not looked her best as a girl. Now, as she was approaching a maturer age, her face was more radiant and her move-

ments almost regal. At sixty she would be more handsome than her mother.

Soon after I had sent the violets an incident occurred which put an end to my practical jokes and recalled to me forcibly how near the edge of a collapse she was in her coolest moments. Having seen her go away in the roadster with Madame Joly, I could not resist the temptation to enter the shop again and familiarize myself with its interior, for every way in which I could get a clearer idea of her surroundings was a step nearer to actual association with her. I was so nervous there that the moment one of the clerks came near me politely to inquire if she could help me find what I wanted I lost my head and said:

"Is Mademoiselle Snyder away?" And the girl looked blank, while I realized I had made the worst possible error. Alberta was not known as Mademoiselle Snyder, quite evidently. I nearly made another blunder by urging the girl not to mention that I had asked such a question, but I stopped myself in time and retreated from the store in as deep confusion as had characterized my first visit there.

Apprehensively I waited at the window until Alberta returned, and the moment she turned the corner I could see that the girl had mentioned my inquiry and that she was ill and shaken. It was several days before she left her rooms again.

VII

SINCE leaving Essen I had kept up correspondence with Edmund Weller, so I was not surprised one day when I arrived at the office to find a letter from him. The contents, however, disturbed me considerably. Hermann Luttsenschlager, Weller wrote, was coming to Paris to attend a series of lectures on bees by a famous French apiculturist. Since returning to the Rhineland from Berlin he had considered keeping bees in order to increase his income. The lectures were to be given in the school in the Luxembourg Gardens and Weller said he had urged Hermann to attend, since he needed a change and could at the same time see the way in which fruit trees and decorative shrubs were trained by his French colleagues. Both Weller and Hermann had visited Paris before the war, but since I knew the city so well, Edmund asked if I would meet his friend and help him find his way around. With his customary delicacy, Weller did not mention the story he had told me and by not doing so made the necessity for discretion more emphatic. Even in Essen he had politely refrained from inquiring about my extraordinary interest in his narrative. I replied at once that I should be more than pleased to be of service to Hermann.

My reply was prompt but the questions which

arose in my mind were not so easily disposed of. I watched Alberta moving back and forth in her rooms, just as she had done before, and the great farce of our blind existence overwhelmed me. Unaided I had reached the bleak conclusion that Alberta was not for me. By forcing myself to laugh at her as she unsuspectingly fastened her garters, at Hermann who was no doubt poring over pamphlets on the lives of bees, at Renée Joly sitting cross-legged for half an hour in the hope of getting a chance to smooth Alberta's coat collar, at the trains puffing in and out of the Gare de l'Est, and the Rhine and the Seine flowing on to the sea, I was able at last to laugh at myself. And yet when I came face to face with Hermann I took a graver view of the situation, for his eyes were clouded ever so little with the cynicism I saw all around me and his mind, though responsive and direct, was noticeably fatigued. I could improvise my own course, like a man driving aimlessly through busy streets, but had I not learned the folly of tampering with the lives of others?

I will not say I had not been tempted to write Lida Wetherby, for I felt sure Alberta had not yet been able to do so and her failure to communicate with her mother I believed to be her most poignant difficulty. Her intense love for her mother and her mother's skepticism regarding the war adventure

upon which Alberta had been willing to stake everything, made it almost impossible for Alberta to reveal herself as a failure. Even her worries served as pretexts to postpone the step which would link her definitely with the past from which she had been wrenched so completely. The same tenacity in her character which had enabled her to build up her ideals tended to make her shield their remains.

Not less had I been tempted to write Alberta or to get in touch with her directly, but I had never had the temerity to do so. The major part of the information which had made my muddled brain the one domain in which all these people groped had come to me accidentally. The rest I had acquired in no honorable manner.

I took Hermann to a quiet place for dinner, and afterward we walked along the boulevards. By the tightening of his face muscles and the spasmodic movements of his fingers I could imagine a part of what he felt. He was in France for the first time in ten years, and he too had loved Paris. He saw upon the faces of the men and women who moved along the sidewalks the same marks of suffering, resignation, abandon or gaiety which he had seen in Berlin or in London. He was like a ghost among them. Once a famous French aviator passed, and Hermann started involuntarily from his chair. He could not talk to me of what meant most to him

and I could say little to him. He was tired from his journey, and so at an early hour I suggested that he go to bed and that we meet again in the morning. Somehow the evening had been a failure.

As soon as I had left him at his hotel door I was sorry I had not been able to get closer to him. He had no way of knowing that I was anything but a casual acquaintance. He was not prepossessing, physically, but his voice had the vibrant quality of which Weller had spoken and his words seemed to focus the spirit within him as a lens makes rays of light effective. His hands were lean and strong and brown from the weather. He walked with an easy stride which made him ill at ease in a crowd. The impression of calm I received at first from him I soon realized was due to an almost fierce control.

I began to doubt whether I ought to bring him into contact with Alberta, which I had assumed at first would be the natural thing. Would he not, in his badly fitting clothes and with his third-class return ticket, be hurt and embarrassed by her elegance? Could he picture her ten-thousand-franc gown and high-heeled velvet slippers in the Rhineland, where she had spaded the garden and helped make the beds? And then, as usual, I forgot the others and took Alberta's part. Could she remain at Neuwied in the face of Frau Lutten Schlager's deep-rooted hostility? Having once enjoyed the inde-



pendence of an adequate income, could she economize among a people who had learned thrift through hardy generations? Would a woman at whom all Paris could not help staring be incongruous in a quiet village? I did not believe her fundamental self had been affected. Perhaps it had been enriched. I could not judge. Surely I would be the last to wish any one's life less abundant or varied.

Without Hermann I felt sure she would drift farther and farther from the world in which men take part and that unfulfilled she would be, in a sense, a monstrosity, for the races of women in whom emotions are deep and inaccessible can least afford to disregard them. But had not their love passed the ideal moment of its fusion point? All things do not run their course. I could not forget that Hermann had hesitated when she had been ready. Could she respond if he offered himself now? And suppose they both tried, out of reverence for what they remembered, to revive an old scene. I was not sure it had ever been done successfully. They were both more capable of renunciation than of pretending.

It came my turn to examine my own motives, and that was the most difficult of all, for since I had been guilty of such unreasonable jealousy I suspected it might tinge every act or decision. I wanted to have faith in human possibilities, but

honest optimism is not one of my gifts. Unless my observations had been false, frustration is a rule, a principal like gravitation which brings all things to a level. That men could suffer was unquestionable, although I wondered whether I had really suffered myself. I was not at all certain that suffering was worth while. Perhaps I had done right in avoiding it.

I reached my apartment about eleven o'clock, and what I saw from my window did not tend to make me more judicious. Alberta was extremely agitated. I almost thought for a moment she had sensed Hermann's nearness in some mysterious way. She sat down at the writing table I had never seen her use, dipped her pen in the ink, threw it down, and started pacing the floor again. Was it possible that she was going to write her mother at last, or that she was seeking relief from thoughts she could express to no living person? Suddenly she started, although the hour was late, and after hesitating a moment opened the door. Madame Joly was there, and something in her attitude gave me the feeling that she was strangely confident. They sat without saying a word, although it was apparent that Alberta was on the verge of talking. My mind raced from one conjecture to another. Slowly I came to believe that Alberta was about to tell the other woman what was on her mind. And tactfully

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Madame Joly seemed to be paving the way for confidences. Alberta's past must have been a torment to the Frenchwoman, also. She must have been in constant fear that it would intrude itself somehow into their lives. That continuous threat, perhaps, was more poignant than the advances of the men they met on every side. At last Alberta permitted Madame Joly to put her arm around her waist and slowly to lead her to the open window, and as the older woman's face became clearer across the narrow street I saw, or thought I saw, an unpleasant suggestion of triumph upon it.

The moon had risen above the rooftops and was shining very brightly upon my face. In my pre-occupation I had not noticed it. Madame Joly suddenly stiffened and with a guttural expletive pointed her finger straight at me, then angrily closed the heavy curtains, and I was cut off utterly from the room I had shared invisibly so long. My eyes blurred with rage. In that instant the resolve I had made to abstain from interference was broken. I could hardly wait for morning to throw everything into confusion. At dawn, however, I fell asleep, and I awoke at nine, still resentful and with barely time to keep my appointment with Hermann.

He seemed so glad to see me that I realized it had been my own nervousness which had made me think the previous evening had been spoiled, and I

wondered if ever two persons had had a common experience and, if so, how they could be sure of it. But without delay I told him I had an errand to do in the rue de Rivoli and asked if he would mind accompanying me there. As we approached the shop *Chez Nicole* the blood pounded in my eardrums and his words to me were blurred and indistinct. Door after door was passed until I faltered in front of the one to which I felt myself drawn. I paused, touched his arm to guide him into the shop ahead of me, watched him step inside and remained petrified until I heard Alberta's stifled scream. Then I fled across the street and into the Tuileries. That was all.

I watched a moment through the iron railing and saw one of the girls who worked in the shop standing at the door with her white apron to her eyes. Dazedly I sat down upon a bench and tried to control my limbs which were trembling and to get strength enough to take me away from the place. I am not sure how long I sat there, but before I could move I saw that Madame Joly, her face almost maniacal with grief, had flung herself without seeing me upon the same bench; and within reach of my hand her square shoulders were heaving as she buried her head in her arms.

Unreservedly I was sorry for her, for her woe was unmistakable. She and I, alone, were left and I

could not restrain an urge to comfort her and to weep with her. She turned and recognized me. Livid, she sprang in my direction and in a panic I ran from the garden and, remembering the fate of the army doctor, did not breathe easily until I had lost myself in the crowd and was a good half mile away.

As I walked on, I envied the woman her sorrow because it was her own. In place of it, I had only a void which had been filled by one who knew nothing of me and whose adventures had been re-assembled by chance in my own poor brain. But as I shuffled from street to street and the tingling in my nerves subsided I wondered about the joys and dangers of direct experience and reflected that I, of all the actors in the strange drama which had absorbed my attention so long, was free to take a train when I felt like it. And so I turned back toward the rue Saint Honoré to tell the concierge that I should be moving from my apartment.

THE END









(Continued from front flap)

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